

Australian Society of Herpetologists | 53rd ASH conference – Fairbridge 2017

West Kimberley Herping Trip

24-28 June 2017

What you need to know before you go



Trip overview

Areas visited	Broome, Roebuck Bay, Windjana Gorge NP, Tunnel Creek NP, Geikie Gorge NP, Devonian Reef System
Group leaders	Ruchira Somaweera (CSIRO Land and Water) Stewart Macdonald (UWA)
Expedition length	5 D/ 4 N
Team size	Maximum 8 participants



Geikie Gorge NP

Trip itinerary

The following is only a tentative and a brief summary of the itinerary. Please keep in mind that some steps may subject to changes based on weather conditions and other factors beyond our control.

Date	Main activities	Species likely to be encountered
24 Jun	Arriving in Broome and setting camp Mud snaking in mangroves at Roebuck Bay	<i>Myron richardsonii</i> , <i>Hydrelaps darwiniensis</i> , <i>Fordonia leucobalia</i>
25 Jun	Herping around Broome Head to Windjana Gorge NP through Gibb River road Evening spotlighting around water holes on Leonard River Night visit to Tunnel Creek NP Night at Windjana Gorge NP	<i>Chlamydosaurus kingii</i> , <i>Crocodylus johnstoni</i> , <i>Chelodina burrungandjii</i> , <i>Litoria caerulea</i> , <i>Litoria splendida</i> , <i>Strophurus ciliaris</i> , <i>Varanus mertensi</i> , <i>Gehyra koira</i>



26 Jun Head to Geikie Gorge NP through Tunnel Creek road *Crocodylus johnstoni*, *Boiga irregularis*,
 River cruise and caving at Geikie Gorge NP *Lialis olivacea*, *Nephrurus sheai*,
 Nighttime spotlighting at Devonian Reef *Heteronotia planiceps*, *Varanus glauerti*, *Varanus acanthurus*



27 Jun Head back to Broome through Great Northern *Hydrophis ocellatus*, *Hydrophis*
 Herping along the way *stokesii*, *Hydrophis major*, *Aipysurus*
 Nighttime offshore boat trip in search of sea snakes *laevis*, *Aipysurus duboisii*
 Night in Broome



28 Jun Departure

Travel to Broome and back

Both Qantas and Virgin airlines operate direct flights from Perth to Broome. You need to be in Broome before **5 pm on 24th June** to set camp, buy groceries and head to the mangroves for night time spotlighting. Please organize your return flight on **29th June morning or after**. Book early to receive better deals.

Travel during the field trip

Depending on the weather condition and number of participants, we will either use a 12 seater minivan, all-wheel drives or 4WDs. We will decide on the most suitable option once the number of participants and the trip plan is finalized.

Accommodation

Accommodation will be at campsites maintained by Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW) and private operators and the cost of camping is included in the trip registration fees. All camping grounds have campsite toilets and showers. You would have to bring your own camping gear:

1. Tent or a mozzie dome (night time temperatures could be between 10-15C with dew in the mornings)
2. Swag/ sleeping bag and sufficient bedding to keep you warm

Food

You are responsible to organize your own meals. We will do a shopping run at the Broome Shopping Center (where both Coles and Woolworths are available) where you can stock up your meals for the 5 days. Please note that food preparation facilities are minimal (we will take 2 camping stoves and a kettle| BBQ places are available in some camping sites) and we will **not have** any means of keeping food cold. Before the shopping sessions we will brief you on suitable suggestions based on the facilities available. A water can with cold water will be available to refill your bottles. We highly advise you to get food that **needs no or minimal preparation** (canned food, sandwiches, wraps etc.). A limited number of cooking utensils and cutlery is available to share. There are two road houses and few options to shop in Fitzroy Crossing to refill your stack and if you want to have a 'fresh' meal for a change.

Field gear

The trip includes trekking, caving, wading in water, walking through mangroves and mud flats, and working on boats. Basically, the things to remember is that you will be working day and night during the summer, in a remote area. This means it could be hot during day and cold at night; days will be long and there is no way to get something if you forget it bring it. So please be prepared!

The following items are essential to bring:

- A reliable and a **strong** headlight and a **sufficient number** of batteries (we will be spotlighting for long hours each of the 4 nights). We even encourage you to have a backup headlight. This will be your sole source of light for both the field work at night and normal camp duties. Please make sure that you will have a 'strong' light (Ledlensers and alike).
- Sturdy footwear – Please note that working in thongs or bare feet is not permitted for safety reasons. Make sure you will have good protection for the feet bearing in mind the landscape and hazards in the Kimberley.
- Field clothes –long-sleeved shirts to protect you when you are out working: from the sun during day and from mozzies and bugs at night. Long pants could help.
- Sun protection – hat (essential), sunscreen and sunglasses.
- Large drink bottle – we will have a large water can to refill.
- Insect repellent – please bring your favorites.
- A small water proof bag might come handy in protecting your stuff in the field.
- Personal medicine.

Very limited options to charge batteries are available at the Ranger's quarters. There is limited mobile reception for Telstra but there is a coin-operated phone at the campsite in Windjana.

Risks

Here are some of the hazards likely encountered during this trip and the controls in-place or suggested.

Specific hazard	Controls – existing and proposed
Vehicle accidents/ Vehicle bogged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group leaders have formal 4WD and Defensive Driving training • Share driving • Take regular stops • Proper training and experience in using recovery gear
Hazards in working outside in the tropics (sunburn, dehydration, wildfire, cyclone, exposure, falling branches)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always keep with the group. Please do not go on walkabouts by yourself. Carry GPS units, and to mark location of vehicle before entering bush. • Dress to conditions; sun screen/hat/long pants and long sleeved shirts. Carry insect repellent and sun screen. • Carry and consume sufficient water and monitor for dehydration. Use salt and sugar supplements if appropriate. • Take breaks as required. • Check SES and BOM sites each morning and evening for fire and weather conditions. Avoid sites with fire warnings in place. • If a team member is missing, take all safe measures to relocate them (e.g. toot horn, flash spot lights). The lost person should seek shelter from sun (& cold at night), stay put and not keep travelling (to avoid dehydration & stress). The remainder of the team return to base, pair up and search in the last know direction that the lost person took from the vehicle / camp site; for a specified period. If not found within one to two hours, initiate communications and emergency procedures.
Potential contact with poisonous/dangerous plants and/or animals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify poisonous plants and ensure no contact is made. • Avoid contact with dead or sick animals or droppings. • Wear appropriate protective clothing to minimise the chance of bites and stings. • Have first-aid kit packed with proper snake bandages (we will carry a group first aid kit). • Leaders to brief the group on safe animal handling procedures and safety concerns around certain animals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Freshwater crocodiles</i>: Handling of larger crocodiles will be only undertaken by the group leaders and trained and experienced individuals complying with DPaW research permit approvals for minimising and mitigating risks from and to crocodiles (primarily bites and subsequent infection). Handling of freshwater crocodiles to be done using standard handling and restraining techniques as recommended in the industry. ○ <i>Saltwater crocodiles</i>: It must be assumed that mangroves around Broome may contain large and potentially dangerous saltwater crocodiles. Pay attention to warning signs, and carry out visual inspection of the area looking for signs of crocodiles and recent activity before work commences (e.g. slide marks and tracks, scat, dead animals/carcasses, small trails of bubbles emerging from bottom). ○ <i>Feral vertebrates</i>: Animals such as pigs, cattle and buffalo can be dangerous if they feel threatened and/or are startled by unexpected human encounters. In areas where these animals are present, be aware and alert to signs of their recent presence (fresh scats, wallows, smell or noise). Avoid the animals where possible. If you encounter an animal,

back away slowly while watching it's response at all times. Where possible, put a tree, rock or backpack between yourself and the animal and let it go on its way.

- *Snakes*: Unless you are suitably trained and experienced, do not handle snakes during this trip. We will carry a sufficient number of snake bandages and the team will be briefed on the correct use of the bandages before the trip commences.

Travelling and working on water in boats

- Group leaders have proper certification to drive the boats used during the trip.
- Ensure personnel in control of the boat adhere to guidelines for operating boats safely and carry all emergency and communicative equipment on board.
- Use PPE recommended in accordance with any information, training or instruction provided.

Potential to disturb heritage listed sites.

- Consult traditional owners before visiting sites on aboriginal title lands. Follow the instructions of traditional owners/rangers accompanying researchers to field sites.
- Be aware of location of heritage listed sites or buildings and do not disturb these areas; be aware of heritage act, obtain relevant permits; be aware of gender issues if relevant.

Ethics

All participants will be listed in a 'Collecting Wild Animals for Educational Purposes' permit issued by the Department of Parks and Wildlife and are individually responsible to abide by the laws and regulations of WA. No collection of any form of samples is allowed during the trip. We will exercise a strict code of conduct when it comes to minimizing harm to the environment while herping and stress to the animal while handling, IDing and photographing. The wellbeing and the safety of the animals comes first.

