

MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release



How Northern Gulf helped create a major new Conservation reserve near Cooktown

Early in 2017 South Endeavour Trust was approached to see if we were interested in purchasing an 18,000 hectare property called Caloola on the Annan River near Cooktown. Of course we were interested. It bordered three of our existing conservation reserves and we just knew how important a property it was. At the same time we did not have enough money to make an offer. However, we had previously partnered with the Rainforest Trust in the US who provided us with match funding to buy a critical rainforest corridor property on the Atherton Tablelands. But there was a hitch. They had very stringent criteria for properties they help buy. We knew that Caloola could meet all of them except that we had to show that the property was critical to the survival of at least one species listed as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

We knew that there were vulnerable and near threatened species there, but was it critical habitat for an endangered species?

Having previously worked with Carly Starr and her team at Northern Gulf on biodiversity surveys of our Cape York nature refuges, we turned again to Northern Gulf for assistance.

It was not going to be an easy job. Most of Caloola is very isolated with no tracks. A lot of walking in some very rugged country was going to be required. Fortunately this didn't faze Carly and her team and out they went in some very trying climatic conditions to install 29 camera traps for recovery four weeks later. What we hoped to find was a Northern Quoll, or better still, a few Quolls. We knew that they were sparsely present on our adjoining lands.

So, did they find a Quoll? Not one, or two but over 1100 images of these beautiful little carnivorous marsupials. Not good enough said the Rainforest Trust, how many actual animals do these images represent? With Quoll photos on virtually every camera the Northern Gulf team went to work using standard techniques to determine that the images represented over 80 individual Quolls. Good said the Rainforest Trust folk but prove to us that this is special relative to other properties. Again Carly and her team went to work. They reanalysed data records from surveyed of 33 properties in the Gulf and Cape York regions where these little animals once roamed before their populations were decimated by cane toads. Sadly Northern Quolls are now only present on six of them. And generally in very low numbers. Nowhere even came remotely close to Caloola.

Not only did Caloola have the largest known population of Northern Quolls in the Gulf and Cape York, but the cameras picked up Quolls and cane toads in the same images. Somehow these Quolls had learned to avoid the poisonous toads. This very exciting discovery suggests that maybe one day toad avoiding Quolls like these may repopulate the range where Quolls were once found.

The Rainforest Trust said "that's enough, let's do it". They provided South Endeavour with match funding to help buy the property and on 31 October it became ours.

Besides its quolls, Caloola has a wide range of other very important conservation values including:

- It sits at the junction of two state significant wildlife corridors and is critical to connecting the Wet Tropics to Cape York
- It has a 20km frontage to the Annan River
- It constitutes 18% of the catchment of the Annan, a river which has one of the highest densities of coral reefs off its mouth in the whole of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area
- Is largely untracked and undisturbed, something remarkable for a property only 6km from the coast
- Is largely weed free
- It has at least five different types of rainforest and of the order of 2000ha of rainforest in total
- It provides important confirmed or probable habitat for a wide range of threatened fauna species including: Buff-breasted Button-quail; Black-footed Tree-rat; Red Goshawk; a range of tropical bats including the Ghost Bat and Semons Leaf-nosed bat; and Bennetts Tree-Kangaroo
- It has very important populations of the threatened Cooktown Orchid and Cooktown Fan Palm.

It is expected that Caloola will soon be formally protected under a Nature Refuge agreement with the Queensland Government. Further major survey work will be carried out in 2018-19 to more fully document its populations of threatened species to help guide the management of wildfire and feral animals.

Huge thanks to Northern Gulf for playing such a critical role in making it happen.



For further information about Northern Gulf Resource Management Groups involvement contact our Biodiversity Program Manager

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