

# Frogs hopping back

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Cooktown in the 1990s. Up to 40 species across Australia have been affected by the highly-infectious fungus, which was first discovered in the late 1970s. James Cook University amphibian disease ecology group's Dr Lee Skerratt said another Far Northern species, the taudactylus rheophilus which lives high on Babinda's Mt Bellenden Kerr, was also likely to be extinct. But he said recent research in the greater Tully region was proving positive. James Cook University research-

ers have been focusing their northern studies on frogs in the Tully Gorge Rd and Kirrama Range Rd regions for the past two years, after research near Cooktown and on the Tableland. "The disease is still killing frogs, especially when the conditions are most favourable, but we're finding more resistant populations that are gradually moving back into higher areas where the main affect of the disease was first felt," he said. The chytrid fungus is best suited to altitudes above 400m, with temperatures between 15 and 27C. Stream-associated frogs have been the most hard-hit species.

Dr Skerratt said researchers were studying the more resistant frogs to try to understand important determinants of the disease from sex to age of frogs, and to map the fungus's distribution. Researchers had recently discovered a commercially-available disinfectant TriGene that could help reduce the fungus's spread if it is used to clean frog-handling equipment. "It couldn't be used to control the disease in wild populations but can control the spread of the fungus when it is used by researchers and people involved in managing wild frog populations," Dr Skerratt said.

and other wildlife from Cairns to Broome, covering a number of rare species and a massive wader migration. The talk will be held at Mission Beach's C4 theatre from 8pm on Saturday, and there will also be tree planting at Maria Creek on Sunday morning. Ring 4068 7197 for more details.

## Bugs on show

A METRE-LONG bug and a giant beetle are the latest recruits in the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service's advertising campaign. Television commercials featuring the larger-than-life kharpa beetles and Asian longhorn beetle larva have gone to air, to remind travellers to be careful not to bring pest into Australia.

## Battery power

CAR manufacturing company DaimlerChrysler will start testing a fleet of commercial vans capable of running on battery power. Plug-in hybrids, an alternative to traditional combustion engines and strongly favoured by some environmental advocates, can run on battery power alone for short trips and can be recharged with a standard electrical outlet. DaimlerChrysler wants to combine a rechargeable battery on its Dodge Sprinter with a diesel engine for a bigger gain in fuel economy.

## Glacier melt

SCIENTISTS say glacier retreat at Heard Island, 1000km north of Antarctica is an example of how fringing areas of the polar region are melting. The break-up of ice in Antarctica is creating icebergs and also opening pathways for accelerated flows to the sea by glaciers. A United Nations report in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has projected sea level gains of 18-59cm this century from temperature rises of 1.8

# Divers check reefs' health



Monitoring efforts: Port Douglas diver Chris Jones helps monitor the Great Barrier Reef as part of the first Reef Check training course in Cairns.

A GROUP of divers will survey Opal Reef off Port Douglas this weekend as part of a global check on the state of our coral reefs. Nine recreational and professional divers are the first to be trained under Reef Check Australia for their part in a major monitoring program of reefs from Port Douglas to Rockhampton.

Divers will lay transit tape at Opal Reef this weekend to count coral, algae and fish species, and record the extent of coral disease and coral predators. Reef Check Australia's Jos Hill said some sites had been monitored for up to six years but support from dive companies, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, the

Marine Park Tourism Operators and Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility had paved the way for the first Far Northern training course to recruit more helpers. The next training course will be run in October and interested people can contact Reef Check Australia at support@reefcheckaustralia.org

# Message presenters truth, according to Gore

Ms Hayes is one of five Cairns presenters who have joined 79 volunteers from across Australia in reading Mr Gore's message on how to reverse climate change. Talks have also begun in Cooktown and the Far North this

month. Ms Hayes said more public presentations would be planned. The "climate change messengers" are also asking people to sign a petition bound for the Federal Government which calls for a 25 per cent renewable energy target

by 2010 and for major greenhouse gas polluters to pay for their emissions by the end of this year. The petition also asks for Australia to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. Ms Hayes said improvements

in energy efficiency and there was a real sense that they would go away and make a difference by changing small things from light bulbs to maybe starting car-pooling," she said. Groups of 30 or more people who were at the Al Gore presentation at their workplac