

## A painted turtle hatchling brings hope



**With a total shell length of less than 3.2 cm this hatchling painted turtle from the Jardine River catchment is both of ecological interest and just dam cute.**

After five years of annual monitoring for adult painted turtle, a tiny hatchling is recorded for the first time in Australia at the tip of Queensland. The survey is led by Queensland government researcher Alastair Freeman in conjunction with the local (Apudthama) land and sea rangers.

The hatchling is probably only a few weeks old and is the first evidence of successful nesting that we have observed during the current project. Sadly, there is also much evidence at the sites where the painted turtles were recorded of damage by feral pigs. These confirmed turtle nest predators are potentially a significant threat to this turtle in Australia.

In the last three years with funding assistance from Cape York NRM, TropWATER researcher Brendan Ebner has partnered with Alastair Freeman assisting with the turtle work while also collecting fish survey data from the Jardine River catchment and surrounding area. This survey work has now recorded 35 species of freshwater fish including new catchment records of a couple of eel species and detections of some of the rarer eel-tailed catfish species. An added bonus with the fish survey work is that some of the techniques used have proven to be very successful at catching painted turtles.



**An image of a Saratoga collected on the recent trip to the tip.**

Pig damage at wetland margins is clearly a major challenge for land managers across much of the Cape. Numerous aquatic and semiaquatic native species including the painted turtle are vulnerable to predation. Dr Ebner commented, 'It seems that broad scale pig management is necessary in the form of culls and targeted baiting, as well as localised intervention in the form of fencing of high priority wetlands'. Finding resources to perform adaptive management of pigs for conserving semi-aquatic biodiversity remains a real challenge. One thing in the painted turtle's favour is the Apudthama Ranger group. Responsible for managing this country, this ranger group, already experienced with controlling pigs along the coast, is ready to take up the challenge of protecting painted turtles.

Please contact Dr Brendan Ebner for further information: [brendan.ebner@csiro.au](mailto:brendan.ebner@csiro.au)

Further reading:

Freeman AB, Strevens W, Sebasio D, Cann J. (2016). A preliminary assessment of the natural history and conservation status of the Jardine River Turtle (*Emydura subglobosa subglobosa*) in northern Australia. *North Queensland Naturalist* 46: 57-68. Include: the key turtle eating paper from literature as well

Waltham, NJ, Schaffer, J. (2017), 'Continuing aquatic assessment of wetlands with and without feral pig and cattle fence exclusion, Archer River catchment', Centre for Tropical

Water and Aquatic Ecosystem Research (TropWATER) Publication 17/04, James Cook University, Townsville, 44 pp.