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MEDIA RELEASE

Refuge discovered in remote WA rainforest

Camera traps stationed for six months in WA's largest continuous rainforest have yielded images that have stunned both scientists and traditional landowners.

Healthy populations of Northern quoll – elsewhere subject to dramatic population decline due to the spread of cane toads – were among a rich diversity of wildlife previously unrecorded at the far North Kimberley's Bougainville Peninsula on Wunambal Gaambera Country.

Twenty cameras show the rainforest, or *wulo*, is also home to dingo, northern brown bandicoots, golden-backed tree rats, echidnas and short-eared rock wallabies. Rainbow pittas, emerald doves and orange-footed scrub fowl were also present.

The discovery is the result of research initiated by Wunambal Gaambera people, the area's Native Title holders. A Federal Government biodiversity grant enabled Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation to fund PhD research by the University of Tasmania.

Rainforests, or *wulo*, are among ten key targets of WGAC's Healthy Country Plan – the management plan for the Unguu Indigenous Protected Area (IPA). Bougainville Peninsula is a unique landscape within the IPA. Bush Heritage Australia is assisting WGAC with implementing the plan.

Unguu Rangers have used early burning programs to safeguard against wildfire and recently re-built a feral-proof fence across the base of the peninsula to stop damage by cattle seeking shelter from the sun.

WGAC chair Catherine Goonack said the research was the first major ecological study of the area since the 1980s, when government trapping surveys identified just two mammal species in the *wulo*.

"We are very pleased that our Unguu rangers have had the opportunity to help learn more about and protect this important refuge for Kimberley species," Ms Goonack said.

Kimberley rainforest occurs largely as small patches of closed forest surrounded by grassy savanna. However pockets on the Bougainville Peninsula – which is almost an island - have joined to form a unique tract of *wulo* unsurpassed in Western Australia.

Although part of the Unguu Indigenous Protected Area, the Bougainville Peninsula is still subject to bauxite mining leases held by the Mitchell Plateau Joint Venture (Rio Tinto and Alcoa).

Available images:

1. still fauna images from camera traps
2. aerial video Bougainville peninsula
3. video rangers/UTAS team on ground with cameras

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Above: A camera trap image of the threatened golden-backed tree rat found on the Bougainville Peninsula, Wunambal Gaambera Country, far North Kimberley.

Below: A dingo strikes a pose in one of 16,000 camera trap images.

