



RIEL

Research Institute for the
Environment and Livelihoods

PhD opportunity: Feral cat ecology and management on the Tiwi Islands



Charles Darwin University's (CDU) Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods (RIEL) are seeking a PhD candidate to undertake a project on the ecology and management of feral cats on the Tiwi Islands, an important hotspot of biodiversity and endemism, and stronghold of Indigenous culture.

Scholarship and financial support:

- Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship valued at \$33,511 per annum (from 2025, indexed annually and tax exempt) for 3 years from commencement is open to Australian citizens/residents or New Zealand citizens, to cover living costs.
- Scholarship 'top-up' of \$10,000 per year for 3 years.
- Fee waiver for 3 years.
- University relocation allowance of up to \$2,000 may also be available.

Project operational costs: Fully covered by an Australian Research Council Linkage grant.

About the project: The Indigenous-owned and managed lands of the Tiwi Islands, 80km north of Darwin, remain one of Australia's most important refuges for biodiversity, supporting healthy populations of many species that have declined severely on the mainland. However, feral cats are currently driving the decline of numerous Tiwi species. As a result, Tiwi Traditional Owners have identified feral cats as a 'top threat to Tiwi values', and the Tiwi Land Council (TLC) is exploring options for feral cat management that are ecologically and economically feasible, and culturally appropriate.

The project focuses on improving our understanding seasonal variation in key aspects of feral cat ecology on the Tiwi Islands, especially movement, feeding and reproductive ecology. This ecological knowledge will be used to parameterise and validate process-explicit population models and evaluate different scenarios of cat management. The student will work closely with Tiwi Land Council personnel, Tiwi Rangers and Traditional Owners, to ensure that their research appropriately takes account of Tiwi perspectives and values, as well as Tiwi Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

The project forms part of a broader Australian Research Council Linkage project—*Cat management guided by Country: integrating Indigenous perspectives into the management of feral animals*—led by CDU, in partnership with the Tiwi Land Council. However, there is plenty of scope for the student to shape their project, in line with their own interests and skills.

Benefits to you:

- Work within a highly collaborative environment, supported by Tiwi Land Council and CDU supervisors, with ample opportunity for professional development.
- Opportunity to work or travel to the remote and spectacular Tiwi Islands.
- Access to Student Support Services and Wellbeing Support Program.
- Work with a University committed to changing people’s lives for the better through training, education, and research.

Essential selection criteria:

- First Class Honours degree, or a Master’s degree containing a substantial research component, in Ecology or similar field.
- Understanding of, and interest in, working with Indigenous people in Australia, and willingness to actively participate in collaborative cross-cultural research.
- Strong analytical skills.
- Willingness and ability to conduct remote fieldwork, and live and work in Darwin.
- Manual driver's licence.
- Must meet the RTP Stipend Scholarship requirements, including being either an Australian or New Zealand citizen, or permanent resident of Australia, and must meet the PhD course entry requirements at CDU.

How to apply: Email an Expression of Interest to Prof. Brett Murphy (brett.murphy@cdu.edu.au), including:

- 1-page cover letter, outlining your experience and research interests.
- A detailed CV, including details of publications (if any).
- Academic transcript.
- Names and contact details of two academic referees.

Application closing date: 18 October 2024

Commencement date: Early 2025

Enquiries: Prof. Brett Murphy (brett.murphy@cdu.edu.au, phone: 0466 623 079) or Dr Hugh Davies (hdavie27@une.edu.au, phone: 0417 828 202)