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NATIONAL

12:51 AEDT Wed 2 May 2001

Cane toads kill Katherine Gorge crocs

Cane toads have taken their toxic toll on top end tourist icon Katherine Gorge, where eight freshwater crocodiles have been found floating belly-up.

"The Katherine Gorge is the first real tourism icon where the impact has shown itself," Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission (PWC) conservation management officer Simon Stirrat told AAP today.

"The dead crocodiles have been found in the gorge proper where all the tourist boats go and that happened this wet season, only in the past couple of months."

The recent sight of dead crocodiles in the picturesque gorge is regarded as the most stark evidence to tourists so far that the toad had gained a foothold in the NT's lush top end.

The deep gorge, which formed the backdrop to the climax of the 1953 Charles Chauvel movie classic Jedda, is a busy thoroughfare for tourist vessels.

Just south of Kakadu National Park, where the toads' arrival was confirmed only weeks ago, the gorge often provides the first glimpse of crocodiles to the north-bound visitor.

While a crocodile that swallows a toad will die in about an hour, recent research suggests the pest will not have a major impact on crocodile numbers.

The PWC has greater concern for populations of native cats, which are already in decline, and goannas.

"A crocodile floating belly-up in the water is something that is very noticeable," Mr Stirrat said.

"Most of the impact on the native fauna probably won't be noticeable to tourists.

"The main impact as far as tourists are concerned will probably be on the tourist amenities."

He said the toads would congregate in numbers at the Katherine Gorge camp ground, where they would be attracted to the open lawns and lights.



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