



Toddler discovers ancient cutting tool at speedway

■ Robert Dougherty

A Broome toddler has unearthed an ancient relic at the speedway grounds, which experts believe to be a 10,000-year-old cutting tool.

Eli Howlett, 4, found the pointed stone artefact under his mother's chair while they attended the Broome Speedway Pearl Cup event on Saturday, September 17.

Baffled by her son's find, Lee

Howlett took to social media asking people to help identify the unusual object.

University of Western Australia School of Social Sciences Professor of World Rock Art, Centre for Rock Art Research and Management Benjamin Smith said the object was a cutting tool estimated to be up to 10,000 years old.

"Australia is extraordinarily lucky to have such a richness of archaeology, that provides evi-

dence of complex indigenous trade, religious practices and environmental management systems extending back tens of thousands of years."

The discovery also attracted the attention of the Nyamba Buru Yawuru Cultural Reference Group.

NBY country manager Johani Mamid said the relic was probably designed to be used as a small knife.

"The artefact is a pointed flake

of a cherty material, probably originally white in colour and stained with iron oxides from the Pindan dirt," he said.

"One of our expert advisers suggested that it has been traded in to the Broome area — stone axeheads were traded into the Broome area from sources close to the Napier and Oscar ranges and from along the Fitzroy."

The relic will now be documented and stored in the Yawuru archives.

Fewer freshies but saltie crocs on rise

■ Robert Dougherty

Scientists are predicting a severe decline in freshwater crocodiles in the Kimberley with the invasion of cane toads while more of their saltwater cousins are expected to frequent areas such as Broome.

CSIRO freshwater crocodile biologist Dr Ruchira Somaweera and Parks and Wildlife estuarine crocodile scientist Dr Andrew Halford made the revelations to the Roebuck Bay Working Group during the Science on the Broome Coast forum at the University of Notre Dame Broome campus last week.

Dr Somaweera said the predicted slump in freshwater crocodiles was due to the advance of the reptiles' biggest threat — cane toads — as well as other factors including bycatch fishing, invasive weeds and intrusion by their bigger saltwater relatives.

This could see the Kimberley follow a similar pattern to the Northern Territory, which has seen a 77 per cent decline of the reptiles at Victoria River and 60



A saltwater crocodile on the muddy banks of Dampier Creek in Broome. Picture: Department of Parks and Wildlife

per cent in the Daly River, according to two studies.

But Dr Somaweera said there was hope for the species with laboratory evidence that WA freshwater hatchlings could survive after attacking cane toads and learn to avoid them, which could then see a resurgence.

"I think we will see a phase of severe decline, and then the resistant animals will form a population," he said.

Dr Halford said surveys conducted in the Roe River and Prince Regent areas had shown significant saltwater croc growth.

"Numbers are up in a range of a 100 to 300 per cent increase; it's been 30 years so it's a very clear example of what happens when you take humans out of the equation," he said.

Dr Halford said sightings on the Kimberley coast were due to the increasing numbers of travelling crocodiles but the environment would achieve a natural balance based on space.

"I don't think the rivers on the west coast are at that level yet because we haven't seen the really big, super old crocodiles and that tells us that the system is still maturing," he said.

Child sex offender pleads not guilty

A child sex offender accused of committing an offence near a Broome school has pleaded not guilty.

The 26-year-old man appeared in Broome Magistrate's Court via video link from Broome

Regional Prison last week.

He pleaded not guilty to one count of committing an offence by a child sex offender being near a school.

The man is also charged with two counts of indecent dealings

with a child under the age of 13.

The charges were remanded for a committal mention date.

No bail application was made and the man was remanded to appear in Broome Magistrate's Court on December 2.

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