

## CLOUD FOREST COMPETITION WINNER

High-school teacher Tony Egan was the lucky winner of the

# Australian Wildlife Secrets' Earthwatch Expedition Competition.

He recently returned from north Queensland where he spent time researching the wildlife of the tropical rainforest. Below is what he had to say about his experience.



Tony holding a Major Skink. Image: George Gornacz

### WHAT WAS THE EXPEDITION ABOUT?

Our Earthwatch team worked with Professor Steve Williams from James Cook University, doing biological surveys to find out the type and abundance of species at each survey site. This information is being used to predict and measure the effects of climate change on the wildlife of the rainforest, so that steps can be taken to help minimise these impacts.

### WHAT WILDLIFE DID YOU SEE?

We saw so much wildlife it is hard to keep count. My favourite animal would have to be the Northern Leaf-tailed Gecko (*Phyllurus cornutus*), a beautiful creature. Other lizards I saw included a variety of skinks, including a Major Skink (*Egernia frerei*), a couple of monitor lizards, and a brief glimpse of a Boyd's Forest Dragon (*Hypsilurus boydii*). I also saw up close an Amethystine Python (*Morelia amethystina*)—another beautiful creature, a Keelback Snake (*Tropidonophis mairii*), a Common Tree Snake (*Dendrelaphis punctulata*) and a small whip snake.



Leaf-tailed Gecko. Image: George Gornacz



Group shot at Ellis Beach. Image: George Gornacz



Left: Daintree River Ringtail

Below: Habitat. Images: George Gornacz

I spotted northern Tiger quolls (*Dasyurus maculatus*), bandicoots, Red-legged pademelons (*Thylogale stigmatica*), native Giant White-tailed rats (*Uromys caudimaculatus*), melomys mice and a number of bats, along with numerous bird species including three Victoria's riflebirds (*Ptiloris victoriae*) (one was displaying, which was another highlight), a sooty owl, a family of lovely fairy wrens, an Azure Kingfisher (*Alcedo azurea*) and a Forest Kingfisher (*Todiramphus macleayii*), to name just a few. We also found lots of frogs, including Northern Barred frogs (*Mixophyes schevilli*), Stony Creek frogs (*Litoria lesueuri*) and banjo frogs, along with way too many cane toads. There were beautiful dragonflies and Ulysses butterflies as well, and a number of scorpions and spiders of different sizes, amazing plants such as strangler figs and some beautiful fungi, plus many more.

### WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THIS EXPEDITION TO ANYONE ELSE?

I sure would. You get an opportunity to see wildlife in the wild—creatures you may only have seen in a book or zoo—and you get to make a real contribution to understanding and protecting the environment. ■

### WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THIS EXPEDITION?

I've travelled to Cairns and surrounding areas a few times and loved the brief time I was able to spend in the rainforest. This expedition gave me the opportunity to explore it properly and see more of its inhabitants.



Litoria xanthomera in amplexus. Image: George Gornacz

### WHO IS EARTHWATCH?

Earthwatch is an environmental, not-for-profit organisation that brings individuals from all walks of life together with world-class scientists to conduct real scientific research. Upcoming Earthwatch Expeditions include diving with Manta rays to research their ecology and behaviour, tracking Koala populations in Cape Otway and investigating the impact of disease and natural disasters on the Great Barrier Reef.

To find out more or to register for an expedition go to [earthwatch.org.au](http://earthwatch.org.au)

