

SUPER TOAD



Fast cane toads are mating with each other, giving birth to super toads.

Cane toads are Australia's reminder of what can happen when an introduced species hops terribly out of hand.

Bringing a bunch of Brazilian toads to Queensland to eat beetles that damage sugar cane seems like a pretty smart idea, right? Wrong. The cane toads leave the beetles alone, while a powerful poison in the toad's skin kills many of our native birds, reptiles and mammals. Toad populations have also grown quickly, and they are spreading across the country at faster speeds than ever before.

Scientists have been baffled why this speedy spread has occurred, but the latest research by Australian biologist,

Rick Shine, might provide an answer. Rick has found that fast-hopping cane toads leave the slow hoppers behind as they spread across the country. This means that they mate with other fast-hoppers, and that super-fast toads are being born. These new toads can cover about six times more ground than their distant ancestors!

Since discovering these super toads, Rick has been working on creating special traps to kill cane toad tadpoles – using none other than the poison found in adult toads. Talk about giving them a taste of their own medicine.

Greta Kite-Gilmour

YOU'RE THE VOICE



Providing people with the right prosthetic body part has always been important. People who need a prosthetic voice can now have a voice reflects their personality.

People can lose their voice from medical conditions, such as Parkinson's and motor neurone disease. They might choose to use a computerised voice to speak – like Stephen Hawking does.

One day, speech scientist Rupal Patel was at a conference listening to people with prosthetic voices. She realised they had voices that didn't fit their bodies or their personalities. Rupal was inspired to use her knowledge of biology, the physics of sound and the psychology of human voices to come up with a way to give people their own voice.

Rupal started a website called VocaliD, www.vocalid.co, which allows people who can speak to donate their voice to make a new prosthetic voice. Anyone can donate their voice – you just need a microphone or a headset. Donor voices are matched to a person who is voiceless. They then add any sounds that the voiceless person can make.

The recordings are mixed and synthesised until a new and unique voice is created – one that matches the person. Having a unique voice can allow people to express themselves and share their own personality and style in conversation.

Amelia Travers