

## Toad Busting: A new duty to Australia?

Libby Robin

Have you got the nerve to swerve? This is a tagline for doing nature conservation in Northern Australia. The uncharismatic Cane Toad, *Bufo marinus*, is an alien invasive species, deliberately introduced from South America by Queensland sugar farmers in the 1930s. Cane Toads are number one on the government's *Feral Animals* control list, yet Cane Toad eradication is increasingly a project for volunteer groups of "Toad Busters". The prominent Kimberley Toad Busters stun toads with vehicle headlights then swerve to crush them. The Cane Toad Muster is, in the words of a folk song, an opportunity for "ornery cowboys" to "unify the nation /to fight a plague they all fear". The muster is a "violent brand new sport" that kills Cane Toads "any way you can".

The treatment of Cane Toads feeds into the "Border Control" mentality in Australia. In Australia, animals, like humans "belong" (or not) as *native* or *alien*, categories based on science developed far from our local ecologies, and unrelated to Aboriginal sensibilities. Conservation biology in Australia is defined as management (control); it engages science for political ends. While ecologists often choose to step away from more-than-scientific aspects of biodiversity control, the ecological humanities leads some reflections on conceptual leakages between ideas about animals and ideas about people, especially where they belong or don't.

Making machismo of killing toads is only partly about protecting native species. It is more about the moral superiority of nature's warriors. In this paper I will explore toad busting as an example of Australia's confusion between nature and nation. If we disentangle patriotism and ideas of national progress from conservation practices, we might enable 'compassionate conservation' (Rose 2016) and other new ways to manage nature (including ourselves), especially in relation to unloved ferals, formerly domesticated animals.

### Bio

**Libby Robin** is a historian of environmental ideas and professor in Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University, and Affiliated Professor in the Division of History of Science, Technology and Environment at the Royal Institute of Technology. She is currently Visiting Fellow Rachel Carson Centre LMU Munich. Her most recent book is *Curating the Future: Museums, communities and climate change* (Routledge 2016), and has been working on various approaches to the idea of the Anthropocene, including through museums and through people's relations with non-human others. This is work towards a book in prep. *Fear of Ferals*.