

Media Release

Eskitis and Australia Zoo collaborate to hunt for new medicines

Griffith University's Eskitis Institute and the world-renowned Australia Zoo today announced that they would join forces in the fight against tropical diseases that devastate much of the world's population.

Director of the Eskitis Institute Professor Ronald Quinn said that this partnership would add unique plant biodiversity to the Institute's collection.

Prominent conservation identity Terri Irwin said Australia Zoo recently discovered a range of unique freshwater springs in the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve in Far North Queensland.

"These springs support a new rainforest type, found only in that location," Ms Irwin said.

"Many of the plants appear to be uniquely adapted to the highly acidic water that emanates from the springs."

Professor Quinn said these rare and unusual plant species may offer unique new chemical compounds that would be investigated for their potential as drugs to fight tropical diseases such as malaria and dengue fever.

Besides unique plant samples that will be catalogued and added to the Eskitis Institute's biota collection, there is an opportunity to collect the same species in different seasons and to collect a complete set of plant parts for species already in the collection.

The samples from the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve will bring an added dimension to the existing Eskitis collection of 45,000 samples of plants and marine invertebrates collected over 15 years from tropical Queensland, the Great Barrier Reef, Tasmania, Papua New Guinea and China.

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Griffith University is an innovative university committed to multidisciplinary teaching and research, and the creation and communication of knowledge. It has five campuses in three cities across the Brisbane-Gold Coast corridor. With more than 33000 students and 3500 staff, it is one of Queensland's largest universities. The Eskitis Institute for Cell and Molecular Therapies is located in the Brisbane Innovation Park adjoining Griffith's Nathan Campus and is focused on finding new therapies for a range of human diseases.

The Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve is a wetland conservation property and a tribute to Crocodile Hunter Steve Irwin.

The 135,000 ha property, in Queensland's Cape York Peninsula, is home to a set of important spring fed wetlands which provide a critical water source to threatened habitat, provide permanent flow of water to the Wenlock River, and is home to rare and vulnerable plants and wildlife. For more information visit www.savestevesplace.com.au