

Beach quoll walks into record books



Secret quoll: This northern quoll was found at a Mission Beach home by Liz Gallie (inset), surprising conservationists, researchers and QPWS staff because the marsupial, listed as endangered, is not normally found on the coast between Ingham and Cairns.

LIZ Gallie never expected to find a rare northern quoll in a rat trap inside her Mission Beach rainforest home.

The tiny marsupial was waiting patiently to be released when she checked the cage last week and had no idea his presence would cause such a stir.

Conservationists are excited by the find because no northern quolls have been documented at Mission Beach, south of Cairns.

The animals are federally listed as endangered.

Climate Change and Sustainability Minister Kate Jones yesterday said

the discovery could be a significant breakthrough, and would lead to a survey of Mission Beach's coastal lowland habitat by rangers in coming weeks.

Far North Quoll Seekers Network's Luke Jackson said the smallest members of the quoll family were known to be roaming the Mareeba and Cooktown districts and had been spotted around Cairns, Port Douglas and Mossman.

"But we have no records for Mission Beach. They're more common in higher areas and rocky woodland country," he said.

The discovery has also been labelled "significant" by the Federal Department of

Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.

Quoll populations have drastically declined over the decades because of habitat clearing, cane toads and competition from feral animals.

A group of 40 scientists warned in February it held grave fears for the northern quoll, golden bandicoot and bilby in the face of a growing list of extinctions across Australia.

Ms Gallie said she was thrilled to release the marsupial.

"It shows there is still so much to be learned from the eco-systems of Mission Beach," she said.