




The Australian Museum Lord Howe Island Expedition 2017—Balls Pyramid Survey for Phasmids

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ABSTRACT. The Australian Museum in partnership with Melbourne Zoo, the New South Wales Office of Environment and Heritage (NSW OEH), the Lord Howe Island (LHI) Board and the LHI Museum along with a team of experienced climbers, landed on the remote and almost inaccessible Balls Pyramid on 21 March 2017. The expedition objectives were to (a) determine the extent to which the critically endangered Lord Howe Island Phasmid (LHIP) (*Dryococelus australis*) existed beyond the restricted area in which it had previously been observed; (b) bring back four individuals for the Melbourne Zoo breeding program; and (c) sample other invertebrate taxa. A team of eleven climbers and support staff spent eight days on Balls Pyramid establishing suitable infrastructure for exploring and sampling LHI phasmid habitat from base to summit, and during daylight and after dark when conditions become particularly perilous. Survey results clearly established that the LHI phasmid is distributed widely across Balls Pyramid with 17 individuals being observed on *Melaleuca howeana* at more than five different elevations from below Gannett Green right up to Cheval Ridge just below the summit. Although less than expected, possibly because of recent drought conditions on Balls Pyramid, the 17 sightings meant that a single female LHI phasmid was able to be returned to Melbourne Zoo to bolster the breeding program.

KEYWORDS. *Dryococelus australis*; Lord Howe Island; beetles; conservation; extinction; climbers.

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