

Eco tourism boost

TOWNSVILLE'S credentials as a centre for sustainability will be under the spotlight next week as the city hosts the 2006 International Ecotourism Conference.

Delegates from across the globe will discuss challenges and opportunities facing the ecotourism industry such as climate change, its role in tackling poverty, indigenous and Antarctic tourism as well as investment strategies.

Keynote speakers and participants will come from as far afield as Kenya, Japan, Thailand, Mongolia and Sri Lanka.

Local eco-tourism accredited operator, Billabong Sanctuary, has thrown its support behind the conference by sponsoring a delegate from Indonesia.

"We thought this would give them a chance to further their knowledge and show them what they can do in their own country," Billabong's Brett Fleming said.

"We've been in the ecotourism business for 20 years and we feel we have a lot to contribute in the way of com-



Eco Tourism advocate Billabong Sanctuary owner Bob Fleming instructs a young naturalist on the wonder of wildlife. JJ006810

munity development, whether it be locally or overseas."

Deputy Mayor and Sustainable Development Committee chair Ann Bunnell said ecotourism had an important role to play in Townsville as the city strived to be clean and green.

"This conference gives us a real opportunity to tap into the expertise of delegates

from all over the world," Cr Bunnell said.

"Ultimately we want to gain insights and ideas on how to balance our goal of protecting our natural resources with our desire to give tourists the chance to experience these beautiful attractions.

"Townsville itself has a lot of expertise in this field. There's no doubt sharing our knowledge will only be beneficial to

the wider environment."

The international event is also tipped to benefit the local economy, according to Townsville Enterprise chief executive officer Glenys Schuntner.

"The international visitors it brings into the region will provide a real boost," Ms Schuntner said.

"Like every event we host in North Queensland, it will be a great opportunity to put the region's great attractions and destinations on show."

The conference will take place at the Southbank Convention Centre between October 30 and November 3.