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JABIRU

Newsletter of the Mareeba Wetland Foundation

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Love is all around

It was a lovely afternoon early in October when Candy McLaughlin and Paul Fagg married on the deck overlooking Clancy's Lagoon. Candy is the daughter of Skybury Coffee and TTT's Ian and Marion Mclaughlin.

About forty guests attended the wedding and were met with

wonderful views, good food and good company. The Visitor Centre is increasingly being sought after as a dinner venue. We also regularly host groups (bird-watching and other) for morning teas, lunches and afternoon teas and can combine these with talks, boat tours, Reserve safaris and customised tours.

Contact the Visitor Centre for more information.



The wedding of Candy McLaughlin and Paul Fagg

Annual North Queensland Crane Count

Every year counting enthusiasts from all over Queensland take part in the annual crane count. The counts take place at known roosts (usually a scenic spot near water), at early evening when the birds start to fly in for the night.

This year expectations were high amongst the twelve participants as we all set off to different corners of Clancy's and Pandanus Lagoons. Even the beautiful wetland sunset didn't distract us from the job at hand.

With binoculars and scopes poised and scribes with pens in hand all we needed were the cranes. But we were to be disappointed. No

cranes were counted roosting at the Reserve on the night of the crane count (though we have seen them since).

This record follows the trend in recent years of decreasing numbers of cranes roosting on the Reserve. In 2001 517 were counted, 212 in 2003 and 193 individuals were recorded roosting at the Reserve in 2004. The majorities of these have been Brolga (*Grus rubicundas*) and have been recorded at Pandanus Lagoon.

Factors that may be contributing to the decline of cranes roosting on the Reserve are: a high



What we didn't see on the Crane Count

water level in Pandanus Lagoon (cranes prefer shallow, bare-banked water bodies for roosting); the removal of cattle from the Reserve (a pattern seen in Townsville Common). The decline in local foraging areas and the increase in feral pigs in the area may also have been contributory. The wardens are undertaking a feral pig control program in order to decrease the detrimental affects these animals are having on the wetlands.

Far North Bush Poetry Competition



Bush poetry workshop

The inaugural Far North Bush Poetry Festival held at the Reserve was an outstanding success. The hosts, Chris and The Grey (Chris and Merv Webster) entertained the participants with their humour and inspired them with their knowledge and experience.

A poetry workshop was held on the first day and people came from far and wide to learn the language and rhythm of bush poetry.

That evening around a campfire, Chris and The Grey entertained a crowd of approximately 60 people with songs and jokes and, of course, poems.

The following day saw twenty-five participants compete against each other in the performance competition. The 'Clancy of the Overflow' award was presented to Veronica Weal of Herbeton for the best-written poem.

Due to the large amount of interest in the

weekend, the Festival will be held next year with events both at the Reserve and at the Mareeba Heritage Museum.

Reserve staff would like to send out a big thank you to all involved in the weekend.



The Grey (Merv Webster)

Gouldian Finch Update



Dr Fintan Bracken and the 'released' birds

Our captive population of finches has been supplemented by a generous donation of 85 individuals from Dr Brendan Barker, a vet and avid breeder from Maroochy. These birds will greatly increase the breeding output and provide new blood into the population.

This year marked the fourth release of Gouldian finches back into the Reserve and was the most ambitious release effort to date.

On the 20th July 2005, the aviary door was opened and 100 birds were released, much

greater numbers than in previous years. We are hoping that the release of a larger flock will result in better survival rates, through the additional safety in numbers.

Adult birds formed the majority of the released flock, as most will have successfully bred in captivity, increasing the likelihood of breeding successfully in the wild.

Dr Fintan Bracken, a postdoctoral scholar from Ireland, supervised the 2005 release. Thirty-five individuals were seen within the three week period after the release. Since the release we

have had a number of sightings of Gouldians in the area, the most promising being a report of a small flock of about 30 birds approximately 7km as the finch flies from the Reserve.

As you travel around the area, look out for Gouldians and report any sightings to Tim and Lisa at the Visitor Centre.

We plan to continue to release larger numbers in 2006. If anyone is interested in helping with the release program or becoming a volunteer please contact the Visitor Centre.



Introduction to Fly Fishing



Les Marsh with a Saratoga

In 1995, the Mareeba Wetland Foundation stocked the lagoons of the wetlands with **Gulf Saratoga** (*Scleropages jardini*), a prehistoric fish that traces its ancestry back to Gondwana. Now, 10 years on, in conjunction with Fishing

Cairns, we are pleased to offer anglers an exclusive opportunity to experience the thrill of targeting these exciting fish, in an environment second to none. To mark the start of this new product, the Foundation is offering its members an Introduction to Fly Fishing on **November 13th**.

A well regarded angling species, Gulf Saratoga are spectacular, high-jumping fighters and are the target icon species for freshwater fly fishers in Australia's tropical north. They are a

ferocious predator and will aggressively attack surface lures and flies.

Saratoga are found in freshwater rivers, creeks and, more commonly, in billabongs and lagoons, where they tend to shelter under lilies and other water plants waiting for a passing meal.

This will only be available as a fully guided fishing experience, however, we will be offering our members an Introduction to Fly Fishing for those who would like to learn

some of the basic fly fishing terms and techniques, or would like to hone up forgotten skills with rod and line. This will be held on **Sunday 13th November** from 8am to 1pm, and will be run by local fishing identities Les Marsh and Terry Holman. A small charge to members of \$15 (non members \$30) will include morning tea and a light lunch. Numbers will be limited, so please phone the Visitor Centre to reserve a spot. Other fishing activities for members are being planned for 2006.

Wildlife Report

One statement we seem to hear regularly at the Reserve is "...it isn't a particularly good time of the year to see birds now is it?..." to which we respond a resounding YES IT IS! In the tropics where there is marked seasonality, the late dry season is often the best time of year to see a diversity of species. As the dry season progresses more birds flock to permanent water and the lack of available moisture in the landscape brings out all sorts of oddities. So far this year has proved no different and there is more yet to come.

Despite the unseasonal rainy weather we had this winter, the rarities put on a good show. A group of

six **Freckled Duck** (*Stictonetta naevosa*) spent a couple of months lazing around Clancy's Lagoon. Listed as a threatened species in five Australian states, the Freckled Duck is an uncommon visitor to far north Queensland. Because of the years of drought much of Australia has experienced in recent times, 'permanent' water has been contracting towards the wetter coasts and it is after these years that Freckled Duck start to appear in this area.



Freckled Duck

These ducks are the rarest in Australia and are more closely related to geese and swans than to ducks.

Bird species number 205 for the Reserve has been seen! An **Eastern Curlew** (*Numenius madagascariensis*) was spotted calling while circling over Clancy's Lagoon early one morning. After getting no response from the ducks, it headed south in search of more animated reactions. This species is the largest migratory shorebird in the world and, in Australia, is usually sighted on tidal mudflats, saltmarshes and other estuarine habitats. Every year adult birds fly across hemispheres, moving

between their breeding and non-breeding grounds. This journey of up to 10,000 kilometres may take as little as 4 days.

Other sightings of note include: a pair of **Black-necked Storks** (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*) breeding on Pandanus Lagoon and raising two offspring; a **Pacific Baza** (*Aviceda subcristata*) sighted around Clancy's for a couple of days; **Australian Bustard** (*Ardeotis australis*) in recently burnt areas around the Reserve; **Latham's Snipe** (*Gallinago hardwickii*) at Clancy's outlet; a **Rufous Fantail** (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*) in the moist vegetation outside the Visitor Centre; and a couple more brief glimpses of **Buff-breasted Button-quail** (*Turnix olivii*) on the gravelly ridges.

Calendar of Events



November

- 13th Sunday
7:00-9:00am
Waterbird Survey
- 13th Sunday
8:00am-1:00pm
Introduction to Fly Fishing
- 27th Sunday
6:30-8:00am
Morning Bird Walk

December

- 11th Sunday
7:00-9:00am
Waterbird Survey
- 11th Sunday
4:00-6:00pm
Members Christmas Drinks
- 17th Saturday
Volunteers BBQ
- 24th Saturday
Final day open for 2005

Getaway

A star has been born amongst us! Reserve Warden Tim Gale was recently shown on **Getaway** entertaining the lovely Natalie Gruzlewski and showing off his skills in the canoe and on the BBQ.

Getaway visited the Reserve in June with the segment only being aired a couple of weeks ago. The

Members' News

The year is coming to a close and Christmas carols are being played on the radio. There are only a few member events left, so if you haven't made it up to the Reserve this year here is your chance.

Waterbird surveys Meet at the Visitor Centre. Accommodation in Jabiru Camp can be booked for the night before to avoid that early start!

Introduction to Fly Fishing Fly-fishing is usually a very expensive sport but thanks to the support of Fishing Cairns, we are able to offer

crew managed to get great footage of Clancy's Lagoon, the canoes and Jabiru Camp. Tim was also interviewed with the conversation focussing on the Foundation's conservation programs.

The story has reminded a lot of people we are here and following the program, we have had

this free to our members. See main article for details. Numbers will be strictly limited, so please phone the Visitor Centre to reserve a spot.

Christmas drinks The Board and staff would like to thank you for your ongoing support by inviting you to join us in celebrating Christmas and the holiday season. Drinks and nibbles will be served on the deck at the Visitor Centre overlooking Clancy's Lagoon.



Tim and Natalie sharing a meal for the cameras

greater than expected visitation for this time of year.

Please notify the wardens of your attendance. Further information on any of these events can be obtained from the Visitor Centre.

As usual, we will be closing for the Wet Season after trading on December 24th, and reopening early April subject to weather and road conditions. During this time work will continue as usual and any volunteers who would like to help should contact the wardens at the Visitor Centre.



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