

## Inside:

- Conservancy AGM
- Bush Poetry Festival
- Wildlife Report
- Events Calendar
- Girlpower and Woody Weeds
- Crane Count
- Volunteers News and Crocs Away
- Art Classes
- Do You Know? Babblers

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## Kadimakara!



On Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> June one of the most significant pieces of artwork in North Queensland was unveiled at the Mareeba Tropical Savanna and Wetland Reserve, in the company of Warren Entsch MP, and a delegation from Japan. A gift from the people of Japan to the people of Australia, the 19 metre long 10 tonne stainless steel sculpture left Japan earlier this year by boat, arriving in Far North Queensland in sections to be assembled on site by the sculptor, Mitsuaki Tanabe with tremendous help and assistance from John Hawes and the rest of the team from Mareeba Rotary.

This sculpture forms part of a significant body of Tanabe-san's work which is displayed in many countries where wild rice occurs, including the Philippines,

Thailand, India and Japan. Tanabe-san is passionate about the importance of his work in promoting the conservation of in-situ wild rice and other endangered species, and he chose the Mareeba Wetlands as the final resting place for his Australian sculpture because of the commitment to conservation by the Wildlife Conservancy of Tropical Queensland, the natural setting for the artwork, and the existing strong links between Cairns and Japan.

Tanabe-san hopes that his sculpture, in the beautiful surroundings at the Mareeba Wetlands where it will be on permanent exhibition, will have an impact on all those who come to see it help them to understand the importance of conserving all endangered species. We admire not only Mr Tanabe's artistic talent, but also his generosity of spirit. We have called his sculpture 'Kadimakara', an aboriginal word meaning giant animal of the dreamtime, creatures which also met with extinction.

All visitors to the Mareeba Wetlands will find Kadimakara along the Lagoon Track – he's hard to miss! ✖

## NEW RESERVE FOR CONSERVANCY

Dr Lesley Clark MP announced last week that land at Kamerunga currently managed by DNR&M is to be handed to the EPA, to enter into a trustee arrangement with the Conservancy. The land at Kamerunga is 108ha adjoining the Barron River and includes both cleared land and rainforest clad hillslopes.

It is hoped that the transfer of the land will be completed early in the New Year. The land has several sites of special interest including historical mining tracks, a disused gold mine, and former

camp used in the construction of the Kuranda Railway, as well as the rainforest. The Conservancy has a number of projects planned for the site ranging from interpretive walks to a wildlife research and rehabilitation centre in conjunction with member organization FNQ Wildlife Rescue, and will be developing a management plan in conjunction with the EPA over the coming months. It is hoped that, subject to approvals and funding, the new Reserve will be ready to open to the public later in 2007. ✖

## AGM

The AGM of the Wildlife Conservancy of Tropical Queensland was held at the Mareeba Wetlands Visitor Centre on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> July. The short formal proceedings and election of the Board was followed by a very pleasant glass of wine and a wonderful sunset. The new Board is constituted to reflect our wider

field of operation and we thank them all for their time and commitment.

President: Tim Nevard

Vice Presidents: Trevor Adil and Annabelle Olsson

Secretary : Peter Apel

Directors: Mick Borzi, Philip Druery, Mia Lacy, Andrew Small. ✂



Merv, the Goondiwindi Grey, at the Mareeba Wetlands

## BUSH POETRY FESTIVAL

The Far North Bush Poetry Festival was held in Mareeba for the second year running, this time the competition was staged at the Mareeba Heritage Centre whilst the evening show, Laughter and Tears from the Bush, was held again round the camp fire at the Mareeba Wetlands.

We had a great turn out on a cool starry

winter's evening at the beginning of August, some 70 people enjoying hot chocolate round the camp fire while Merv, and indeed some of his friends, entertained us with songs, stories and, of course, poetry. It really was a special evening, and we hope Merv and Chris are able to join us again next year and help keep the tradition of bush poetry alive and well in the Far North. ✂

## WILDLIFE REPORT

So far the dry season has proved very wet. With most of tropical Queensland, including inland and western Queensland, experiencing quite extensive and unseasonal rains there is a lot of water and habitat available for the birds. Reflecting the nomadism of Australia's waterbirds, numbers are quite low on the lagoons with approximately 80 birds being counted on Clancy's Lagoon this August during our monthly survey compared to 760 for the same period last year. Of notable absence is the **Eurasian Coot** (*Fulica atra*) who numbered 400 last August versus 4 this August.

But it is not all bad news. **Pygmy-geese**, both green and cotton (*Nettapus pulchellus* and *N. coromandelianus*), are a common sight dabbling at the surface of the water while **Comb-crested Jacanas** (*Irediparra gallinacea*) are busily skating across lily pads chasing after insects. The lack of bird numbers on the water have been overshadowed by the large number of bushbirds that can be heard squabbling over positions on nectar rich bottlebrush flowers. **Honeyeaters** are in abundance and come in all sizes from the raucous **Noisy Friarbirds**

(*Philemon corniculatus*) and **Blue-faced Honeyeaters** (*Entomyzon cyanotis*) to the smaller, but no less noisy, **Brown Honeyeater** (*Lichmera indistincta*).

**Grey-crowned Babbler** (*Pomatostomus temporalis*) troupes show off their acrobatic skills as they chase each other around play-fighting, behaviours that strengthen the group bonds and through co-operation in caring for offspring, increase their chance of genetic success as a family unit.

The **Australian Reed-warbler** (*Acrocephalus stentoreus*) is a noisy migrant returning for the Australian summer. Flitting between the reeds surrounding the lagoons and the denser foliage of the figs outside the office window they make a nice distraction from the computer screen. Also from the office window **Double-barred Finches** (*Taeniopygia bichenovii*) are nesting. The books cite that this species nest February-May in northern Australia and this extremely unseasonal breeding in August may be due to the abundance of food still available from the late wet season. ✂



Blue-faced Honeyeater feasting on fruits of the Umbrella Tree



Double-barred finches enjoying a bath at the edge of Clancy's Lagoon

## GIRLS ATTACK WETLAND'S WOODY WEEDS

Year 9 girls from Loreto Normanhurst (a Catholic girl's school in Sydney) recently spent two weeks visiting far north Queensland as part of their annual Outreach program we put them to work clearing some of the woody weeds around the Lagoon Track.

The savanna woodlands of tropical Australia have undergone a dramatic change with the introduction of grazing and altered fire regimes. Once grazing is established cattle eat the grass, removing the fuel for fires and the competition for resources with shrubs and weeds. This results in the rampant growth of trees and shrubs and a disappearance of the open grasslands - a process known as woody thickening. This is occurring throughout Australia's tropics.

In order to reverse this decline Conservancy staff and volunteers are

undertaking an ecological burning regime and in some instances, direct removal of the woody weeds themselves. This is where Loreto Normanhurst comes in. The girls removed hundreds of saplings from an area of approximately 3 acres along the Lagoon Track. The majority of the trees removed were either Broad-leaved Melaleuca (*Melaleuca viridiflora*) or Quinine Tree (*Petalostigma pubescens*) - two of the Reserve's worst woody weeds.

This now open grassland will provide important habitat for the Reserve's threatened seed-eaters and grassland birds. It will also be used for educational purposes and as a further example of habitat restoration on the Reserve. We look forward to some more Loreto Normanhurst girl-power next year! ✨



### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

#### SATURDAY SEPT 9<sup>TH</sup>

10AM-3PM HEIDI WILLIS SKETCHING WORKSHOP

#### SUNDAY SEPT 10<sup>TH</sup>

7.00AM BIRD SURVEY

#### SATURDAY SEPT 16<sup>TH</sup>

10AM-3PM HEIDI WILLIS SKETCHING WORKSHOP

#### SATURDAY OCTOBER 7<sup>TH</sup>

5.00PM CRANE COUNT

#### SUNDAY OCTOBER 8<sup>TH</sup>

7.00AM BIRD SURVEY

#### SUNDAY NOVEMBER 12<sup>TH</sup>

7.00AM BIRD SURVEY

#### SATURDAY DECEMBER 16<sup>TH</sup>

VOLUNTEERS CHRISTMAS BBQ

## BOTANICAL SKETCHING WORKSHOPS

Enjoy a day with renowned botanical artist Heidi Willis at the Mareeba Wetlands. Heidi has had artworks included in many prestigious art exhibitions including the 'Botanica' exhibition in the Sydney Royal Botanical Gardens and the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation exhibition. She has also been a finalist in the Waterhouse Natural History Art Prize, Margaret Flockton Award, and the 'Focus On Nature IX' exhibition. Heidi currently has

work on exhibition in New York.

The workshops will be held on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> September and Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> September from 10am-3pm at the Visitor Centre at the Mareeba Wetlands. Spaces are limited so book early!

Cost for the day, including light lunch and tea and coffee: Members \$20.00  
Non-members \$30.00.

To find out more, what to bring and reserve a place, phone Tim or Lisa on 4093 2514, or email [visitor.centre@mareebawetlands.com](mailto:visitor.centre@mareebawetlands.com) ✨



## CRANE COUNT 2007

The annual Crane Count will take place this year on Saturday October 7<sup>th</sup>. Elinor Scambler of Birds Australia who co-ordinates the count, assures me that this is an aberrant year with its very high rainfall, and that it is as important as ever to count cranes on the day, even though

numbers being reported across the Tablelands are well down. In fact, Elinor would welcome any information leading to the tracking down of cranes across the tropical north. Visit the website for more information: [www.ozcranes.net](http://www.ozcranes.net), or contact Tim or Lisa to be part of the Wetlands count. ✨



## CROCS AWAY!

We have been enjoying the company of several volunteers this winter, from Germany, Wales as well as Australia. One of the projects which is coming to fruition under the enthusiastic leadership of Daniel Zwolenski is the crocodile translocation initiative, which has been several years in the planning. This year will see up to 40 freshwater crocodiles (*Crocodylus johnstonii*) removed from a site on the Mitchell River to the wetlands, under the supervision of wildlife vet and croc expert, Annabelle Olsson.

The crocodiles will form part of a research project led by the Conservancy, and anyone interested in assisting in this work, including monitoring and radio tracking, should contact Daniel on [crocs@mareebawetlands.com](mailto:crocs@mareebawetlands.com) or visit our

website and follow the links to the croc project. Meanwhile the volunteers have been enjoying some habitat work, including building rafts to carry the sand onto the islands, and as the weather warms up this appears to be an increasingly popular activity!

Finally, with the departure of Tim and Lisa later in the year after two busy seasons at the Wetlands (yes, sad but true) we shall be looking for an Assistant Warden to live at the Reserve during the Wet Season. If you are interested, please contact Gwyneth for more information on [info@wildlifequeensland.com.au](mailto:info@wildlifequeensland.com.au). In the meantime those of you who have come to know Tim and Lisa will I am sure want to join us in wishing them the best of luck in their new adventures! We shall miss you! ☘



Volunteers from left: Marius, Anna, Michael, Daniel & Josh

**DID YOU KNOW...?** The **Grey-crowned Babbler** (*Pomatostomus temporalis*) lives in groups of 2-12 containing an adult breeding pair and their offspring as well as unrelated birds. Although capable of breeding, these 'extra' birds act as non-breeding helpers and are extremely important to breeding success as they assist with nesting activities and territorial defence. It is not necessarily a life of celibacy for these birds and helpers may disperse to establish their own breeding group or as breeding spaces become available.

One noticeable feature around the open woodlands of Australia is the large, domed stick nests of Babblers built precariously on limbs of shrubs and trees. These nests are used as dormitories for communal roosting at night with an extra nest built for breeding.

Babblers eat insects which they find on the ground or on the branches and trunks of trees and shrubs. Their long, curved bills act as efficient levers for prising insects from crevices and from under bark. They are even able to break into termite mounds and during drought years, have opened up mounds, unintentionally making this important food source available to other species.

Although still fairly common in the north, Grey-crowned Babblers are declining over the southern edge of their range, Victoria, where they are listed as a threatened species. The decline is attributed to loss and fragmentation of habitat.



Spot the babbler posted as 'lookout'!

