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Rare Bird Research



The Buff-breasted Button-quail (*Turnix olivii*) is one of Australia's rarest and least known birds. It is listed as Endangered and it is believed that the world population numbers no more than 500 adults, all residing in a 50km² area within the Mareeba Shire. Yet very little is known about this bird, and it has never been photographed.

The Wildlife Conservancy of Tropical Queensland has just received funding from the Federal Government's Envirofund programme and the Norman Wettenhall Foundation to undertake a ground-breaking study of the Buff-breasted Button-quail in the Mareeba Shire.

The Conservancy's project team will be co-ordinated by Lisa Collins, one of the Conservancy's wardens and an experienced birder and researcher. Local ornithologists Lloyd Nielsen and

Del Richards are also contributing their skills to the team. The project aims to determine the status and habitat requirements of these birds within the Mareeba Wetlands and adjacent Reserves. It also involves radio tracking to determine their habitat use and movements, and this information will be used to develop management guidelines for the species.

Local and interstate volunteers will start arriving at the Mareeba Wetlands from the beginning of December to participate in the project that will run until the end of March. Anyone interested in participating in this project should contact Lisa Collins on (07) 4093 2514 or email visitorcentre@mareebawetlands.com ✘



Lisa Collins looks for Buff-breasted Button-quail at the Mareeba Wetlands

You are invited.....

All members, volunteers, their friends and families and other supporters of the Wildlife Conservancy of Tropical Queensland are cordially invited to help us celebrate the end of another wonderful year. This will take place on **Saturday 9th December, commencing 4pm.**

In true Christmas spirit, Lisa and Tim will give an illustrated talk on the Birds of the Mareeba Wetlands; volunteer extraordinaire Daniel Zwolenski, who came for two weeks and stayed for 6 months, will entertain us on the subject of

steep learning curves and encounters with crocodiles; and Mike Anthony, a well-known North Queensland herpetological expert, will educate us on the Frogs of the Dry Tropics, including the Mareeba Wetlands. These fascinating talks will be followed by drinks and a light supper on the verandah.

We do hope you can join us for our last event of 2006. Just phone or email how many are coming to Hannah at the Visitor Centre on 4093 2514 visitorcentre@mareebawetlands.com ✘



Far North Tourism Awards

With the FNQ tourism industry enjoying its glitzy night of nights in Cairns recently, congratulations must go to all staff and volunteers of the Wildlife Conservancy for winning a special 'Encouragement Award' for their entry in the awards and for being runners up in the Ecotourism section.

The Ecotourism category is always hotly contested, and we congratulate the Daintree Discovery Centre for taking out the award. A well deserved win for our rainforest buddies!

Congratulations also to other local winners, Skybury Coffee Centre, and Golden Drop Mango Winery. ✖

Senator Visits

We were delighted to have Senator Andrew Bartlett to lunch at the Mareeba Wetlands in October. The Senator was here in his role as Chair of

the Senate Enquiry into Parks and Protected Area Management. We hope that he will take back a clearer understanding of the fundamental issues at the conservation coalface!

Wildlife Report

A new bird has been added to the Reserve List in recent weeks. The mysterious and boldly patterned **Painted Snipe** (*Rostratula benghalensis australis*) appeared quietly one afternoon on Pandanus Lagoon where at least three different Painted Snipe were seen during the following week. These birds are very rare with one local birdwatcher reporting 32 years between sightings! Five **Latham's Snipe** (*Gallinago hardwickii*) were also recorded around the edge of Pandanus Lagoon.



A Painted Snipe on Pandanus Lagoon in November



Brolgas on Pandanus Lagoon

Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*) and **Brolga** (*Grus rubicundus*) have returned to roosting on Pandanus Lagoon in large numbers. This year's annual north Queensland crane count saw 80 cranes being counted and numbers up to 170 have been counted since. These large roosting flocks seem to be in roughly equal proportions of Brolga to Sarus Crane.

Waterbirds have started to return to the lagoons with large numbers of **Wandering Whistling Duck** (*Dendrocygna arcuata*) noisily announcing their presence. A number of these have formed pairs and started breeding and there are lots of ducklings at various stages of growth trailing their parents like miniature train carriages through the lilies. **Eurasian Coots** (*Fulica atra*) are still in low numbers but other ducks, such as **Pacific Black Duck**, **Grey Teal** and **Hardhead** are increasing.

Whiskered terns (*Chlidonias hybrida*) delight us with their aerial displays over Clancy's Lagoon seen from the verandah.

The nomadic bushbirds are also passing through at the moment. **Rufous Fantail** (*Rhipidura rufifrons*) and **Black-faced Monarch** (*Monarcha melanopsis*) have been sighted around the Visitor Centre. **Yellow and Brown Honeyeaters** (*Lichenostomus flavus* and *Lichmera indistincta*) have been breeding and **Willie Wagtail** (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) successfully fledged two chicks this season after the disaster last year when they became the dinner of the resident **Brush-tailed Possum** (*Trichosurus vulpecular*). In a triumph of hope over experience, our wily Willie has another clutch in the same spot outside the office window, but Priscilla the Possum has been spotted swinging from the Visitor Centre in close proximity and it is anybody's guess who will outwit whom. ✖



Whistling Ducks on Clancy's Lagoon



Successful Government Tender for Conservancy

Further to our tender to the Department of Environment and Heritage under their Managing Australia's Biodiversity Hotspots Programme, we were successful and have just signed a contract to be panel members for acquisition of land in the Wet Tropics, Einasleigh Uplands, Cape York, Gulf Plains and Desert Uplands bioregions.

In essence this provides funds (up to 66%) for land acquisition that meets

the government's Biodiversity Hotspots criteria and provides ongoing protection for these special places.

This represents benchmark recognition for the Conservancy and offers opportunities to increase the scale and scope of our land management activities. If any of our members know of any important biodiverse parcels of land that are in need of protection, please talk to us. ✘



Putting in fire breaks at the Mareeba Wetlands

Funds for Finches

The Freeman Family and their conservation fund, the North Queensland Wildlife Trust, have made another generous contribution in support of our Gouldian Finch reintroduction programme.

The Trust raises funds and donations from visitors to the Freeman's wildlife parks which include the Cairns Tropical Zoo and Hartleys Crocodile Adventures. Each year the Trust gives away thousands of dollars in support of local conservation initiatives.

We were lucky indeed to be a major recipient this year, receiving \$5000 in support of our finch programme. Peter Freeman said, "We are excited to be able to support the fantastic work the

Conservancy is doing to save this beautiful bird from extinction. The Trust was established to support conservation programmes in Far North Queensland, and what better example than the race for the survival of a species right here on our doorstep!"

We are extremely grateful to the Freeman Family. Funds are needed to provide for the ongoing care of the finches in the breeding aviaries, where they are kept prior to release each year.

The 2006 release is currently under way, and any person seeing birds like these in the wild, particularly in the Mareeba, Biboohra and Dimbulah areas, are asked to contact us on 4093 2514 or email info@wildlifequeensland.com.au ✘



Black-headed male enjoying a taste of freedom

Staff News and Wet Season Closure

With the departure of Tim and Lisa, things have been pretty quiet at the Visitor Centre. Volunteer Hannah Watts is now working in the Centre until Christmas! Daniel continues to extend his two week stay and has been finishing off the 2006 crocodile project as well as helping on many other fronts for the Conservancy.

Lisa returns for the Buff-breasted Button Quail research project, and Tim has been successful in obtaining a job with DNR&M in Mareeba, so congratulations to Tim and lucky us, as they will make fantastic volunteers! A

special big thank you to Peter Sonntag who has volunteered to take all Twilight Safaris until Christmas .

Volunteer warden David Hinklin will be living at the Reserve during the Wet Season pending new wardens. If you know of anyone who might be interested in working at the Wetlands , please give them our contact details. In the meantime, **we will be closing for the Wet Season on December 24th, re-opening at the beginning of April.** The Conservancy's office at the Mareeba Wetlands will be open as usual from early January. ✘



A tough job - Hannah practising her boating skills!

Daniel and the Crocodiles!

Daniel Zwolenski, aka Snappy, has been co-coordinating the freshwater crocodile translocation into the Mareeba Wetlands. This year he was able to surmount all logistical difficulties and organise two capture runs, one to a remote cattle station on the Mitchell River, the other to a site much closer to home on the Walsh River.

With the assistance of volunteers, Board members and under the supervision of staff from QPWS, our team successfully managed to trap a total of 4 crocodiles. Now it may sound fun to go and catch crocodiles, but I understand that several hours up to the chin in murky leech infested waters lugging heavy nets upstream can dampen the enthusiasm of even the liveliest of volunteers, so think

twice before you volunteer your services for next year!

The crocodiles were released unharmed into Clancy's Lagoon, to explore their new home and all the lovely sand that Daniel has been shifting by shovel and boat these last few months. One is fitted with a radio tracking transmitter to enable us to follow her whereabouts.

To date we have seen one croc, basking on one of the floating islands – an exciting moment for guests the boat tour! Our permit from QPWS is to be extended for 2007 to allow us to continue with the project until we have relocated sufficient individuals for a self-sustaining population to inhabit the Wetlands.✘



Daniel and Tim Gale undertaking field work!

DID YOU KNOW...? *The Australian Painted Snipe (Rostratula benghalensis australis) is a stocky wading bird of which little is known. As is the case with many wading birds, the female is larger than the male and, in the case of Painted Snipe, more brightly coloured. This species is listed as threatened and, because of its cryptic nature, it is often overlooked. Painted Snipe feed in shallow margins of freshwater wetlands on seeds and invertebrates such as worms, molluscs and crustaceans and blend in with their muddy surroundings exceptionally well. The sex life of a Painted Snipe is interesting indeed. Like a few other Australian species e.g. Jacana and Emu, it is thought that the female mates with several males leaving each to incubate and raise the 3 or 4 young. Painted Snipe are most often seen between August and March and it is not known where they go for autumn and winter.*

