

Issue 33

Autumn 2006

JABIRU

Newsletter of the Wildlife Conservancy of Tropical Queensland

Inside:

- Open Day May 14th
- Wildlife Report
- Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group
- Gouldian Finches
- Volunteers News
- Events Calendar

Wildlife Conservancy of
Tropical Queensland

PO Box 175
Mareeba Q 4880

PHONE:
+7 4093 2514

FAX:
+7 4093 2514

E-MAIL:
Info@mareebawetlands .com

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.mareebawetlands.com

[www.wildlifequeensland.com.](http://www.wildlifequeensland.com.au)

[au](http://www.wildlifequeensland.com.au)



Wet Wetlands!



The clean up from Cyclone Larry had been done, fallen trees cleared, the Visitor Centre was painted, the roads and tracks slashed, and we opened as planned on April 5th! But forces beyond our influence were at work, and our plans for a busy Easter were well and truly dampened.

The heavy rain which followed Cyclone Monica turned Pickford Road into a veritable slalom course and we were forced to close again. The western end of

the road became a kilometer wide river, and we were cut off for several days waiting for the flood waters to recede!

The lagoons were full to bursting, water was flowing right through the Reserve, fish swimming where they should never have been. And.... wardens Tim and Lisa were forced to do some serious birding!

But opportunity comes from adversity, and Mareeba Shire Council have come to our aid repairing Pickford Road making it a tourist-friendly access at last! With the busy tourism season fast approaching we are extremely grateful to Council for giving our road this priority.

Although we were forced to postpone our sponsors event planned for the end of April, we are planning something extra special for June. And see inside for more information on our **Open Day on Sunday May 14th**✘

Conservancy Update

The launch of the new Wildlife Conservancy of Tropical Queensland (WCTQ for short) took place on April 7th at the beautiful Whitfield House next to the Botanic Gardens in Cairns, with Desley Boyle MP, Minister for the Environment officiating.

Representatives of our founding organizations, other environmental groups, government bodies and tourism businesses all enjoyed the celebration.

This is the first newsletter of the Conservancy, and there is more on one of our partner organisations, the Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group, inside. We look forward to hearing about other organisations in future editions✘



Guests enjoy the WCTQ launch at Whitfield House

Open Day and Mother's Day Celebrations



Treat Mum to a peaceful boat tour on Mother's Day – and the champagne is on us!



The forthcoming Open Day at the Mareeba Tropical Savanna and Wetland Reserve on **Sunday 14th May** offers a great opportunity to treat Mum to something a little extra special and different this year. With activities ranging from nest box building, paddling canoes, games and competitions for children, a native wildlife display, to a peaceful boat trip around with the lagoon with complimentary glass of champagne for mothers, rounded up by an afternoon walk and

sunset wine and cheese –something for all the family! The normal entry conservation levy to the Reserve will be waived as it is our Open Day, so a great opportunity for locals to find out what goes on at their local nature Reserve!

And to make the day even more special, we have teamed up with the newly opened Skybury Australian Coffee Centre. If you present the Mareeba Wetlands Mother's Day flyer (available from the Wetlands Visitor Centre,

Skybury, the Mareeba Heritage Centre and Mareeba businesses) Mum can enjoy a free cup of coffee or cake with lunch at Skybury. Our special extended opening hours mean you can stay and enjoy the sunset across Clancy's Lagoon as well.

The Reserve will be open from 10.00 am until dusk. To find out more, phone the Mareeba Wetlands Visitor Centre on 4093 2514, and do encourage all your friends to come too! ✨

Wildlife Report

The Wet Season is finally over after a pretty slow start. It was only thanks to Cyclones Larry and Monica that the Reserve recorded anything near the wet season average rainfall. With the Reserve cut off from civilisation for a few days due to an overnight fall of 5.5 inches, there was only one thing we could do. Go birdwatching!

One thing bird watchers in coastal areas love is a good cyclone. While most people are safely tucked away from the storm, at the first sign of the winds dropping bird watchers clad in raincoats can be seen with binoculars pointed towards the sky looking for poor, exhausted birds that have been swept along with the

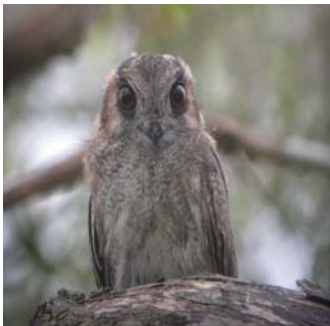
gale force winds. Although approximately 50km inland, here at the Wetlands we had binoculars ready for that unusual sighting that follows a cyclone. And we weren't disappointed.

Hunkered down on the staff verandah a call for identification of a bird from one of our volunteers was met with a half hearted mumble about a likely **Whistling Kite** (*Milvus sphenurus*) or **Osprey** (*Pandion haliaetus*)- both frequent visitors to Clancy's Lagoon. Binoculars to eyes to humour him we discovered that it was, in fact, a **Lesser Frigatebird** (*Fregata ariel*), a seabird more commonly found offshore with its very distinctive pterodactyl-esque body shape and a

new bird for the Reserve.

On a short walk afterwards to check on all the buildings we encountered an **Australian Owlet-Nightjar** (*Aegotheles cristatus*) whose hollow tree in which it lived had blow over. These small birds are essentially nocturnal flycatchers, and are the most common nocturnal bird in Australia.

The cyclones left a large trail of destruction through the southern Atherton Tablelands where large tracts of rainforest were levelled. Since then there has been a steady stream of



An **Australian Owlet-Nightjar** gets a shock after its home fell down during Cyclone Larry

rainforest birds passing by the office window in search of food and habitat. Species of note include the migratory **Rufous Fantail** (*Rhipidura rufifrons*) and two new species for the Reserve's bird list, the **Black-faced Monarch** (*Monarcha melanopsis*) and the **Brown Cuckoo-Dove** (*Macropygia*

amboinensis). With all the rain that has followed the cyclones in Queensland and the new habitat opportunities that have arisen, waterbirds are still scarce on the lagoons. As we watch the Reserve slowly dry out, our thoughts drift to distant waterways filled with waterbirds and we wonder when we can expect the

return of these species✘



The unmistakable outline of a Lesser Frigatebird

Gouldian Finch Update

The Gouldian Finch breeding season is well underway and this year is shaping up to be very productive. With approximately 60 juveniles fledged already, we are well on our way to a captive population of 200 birds. This year's release will once again be held in July. In preparation for the big day we are habituating the finches to feed from hanging bird feeders, which will be used to supplement feed the finches when released, but preventing

larger birds from eating it all (and them!).

At present there are lots of grey-green juveniles in all stages of development in the aviaries. Fresh from the nest with their luminescent blue dots at the corners of their mouths, the very young are mixed with older chicks. In the dark hollows that are Gouldian nests, these bright blue dots act as a nocturnal target at the mouth of the nestlings enabling their parents to direct food into their mouths. Many of the

other chicks are more advanced and are beginning to get the bright colours of adult birds. It sometimes it looks as if a small child has been let loose with a pack of textas and scribbled lines and blotches on them as each juvenile feather is replaced with a coloured adult feather! ✘



Juvenile finches

News from the Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group

The Tree-Kangaroo and Mammal Group (TKMG) formed in 1997, is based on the Atherton Tablelands made up of local residents interested in, and concerned for, the conservation of North Queensland's rich mammal fauna. These include Australia's largest arboreal mammals, the Lumholtz's and Bennett's Tree-kangaroos (tree-climbers), the Spotted-tailed Quoll and Musky Rat-kangaroo, and mammals of the wet

sclerophyll forests including the Yellow-bellied Glider, Northern Bettong, and the Black-footed Tree-rat.

Our aims are to conserve tree-kangaroos and other Far North Queensland mammals by promoting awareness and knowledge, assist with studies into their habitats and to liaise with other groups. The group meets on the first Thursday of each month, at the Malanda Hotel,

visitors most welcome. The May meeting is on Thursday 13th. The guest speaker is Jim Thomas of the Tenkile Conservation Alliance in New Guinea, which aims to save the Tenkile, or Scott's Tree Kangaroo (*Dendrolagus scottae*). The Tenkile is one of the most endangered mammal species in the world with as few as one hundred individuals remaining. For information contact info@tree-kangaroo.net ✘



By Alan Gillanders



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

SUNDAY MAY 14 MOTHER'S DAY

OPEN DAY VISITOR CENTRE
10:00 – 6:00PM
7.00AM BIRD SURVEY

SUNDAY JUNE 11TH

7.00AM BIRD SURVEY

SATURDAY JUNE 17TH

KADIMAKARA UNVEILED

SUNDAY JULY 9TH

7.00AM BIRD SURVEY

AUGUST 4-6

2006 BUSH POETRY FESTIVAL
MAREEBA HERITAGE
MUSEUM/MAREEBA WETLANDS
"Laughter and Tears from the Bush" From 6pm
Saturday 5th August at the Mareeba Wetlands

SUNDAY AUGUST 13TH

7.00AM BIRD SURVEY

Volunteers

We are lucky to have the help of four volunteers from overseas at the Mareeba Wetlands this autumn.

Alison Connelly, who works in Marketing and Fundraising for the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) in Scotland, is here for a month as part of the RSPB's sabbatical programme. *"I am enjoying immensely my time volunteering at the Mareeba Wetlands Reserve, doing a bit of everything - even cleaning the visitor centre loos! The RSPB, the UK bird and wildlife conservation charity has a sabbatical programme for long serving staff 'to*

further conservation, anywhere in the world', and - well - here I am! I arrived just before Cyclone Monica, and so got to experience all the torrential rain and flooding which left the Reserve cut off for days. But for the temperature, it could almost have been Scotland!"

Three Dutch volunteers from Delft University – Ralph, Marijn and Daniel – are here as part of their degree in sustainable tourism. *"We're enjoying ourselves at the Mareeba Reserve doing jobs like repairing tracks, painting and weed spraying. It's a very nice place to work with beautiful scenery, a fantastic lagoon and*

various birdlife.

Although we've had a lot of rain it didn't really bother us. We did a 'survival tour' in the rain when the Reserve was cut off, walking through all the rivers that were flooding to get to the Bibohra store for supplies. At some places the water was almost a meter high and fish were swimming over the road! Of all our walking trips, we enjoyed this one the most!"

Thank you to all the volunteers who braved Pickford Road last month to attend our training day. The volunteer roster is working well – if you are interested in volunteering, please contact Lisa at the Visitor Centre✘



Alison enjoying our Australian weather!.



3 dutchmen and a new customer!

DID YOU KNOW...? There are five species of frigatebird in the world of which three can be found in Australian waters. Frigatebirds are related to pelicans and have the greatest wingspan to body weight ratio of any bird. Also known as Piratebirds, they are well known for their dramatic aerial feats using speed and manoeuvrability to 'persuade' fellow seabirds to give up their catches. Frigatebirds are, however, quite capable of catching their own food by snatching them up from the surface of the water as they fly by.

Frigatebirds are truly aerial, spending the majority of their lives in the air. They are able to stay aloft for more than a week, only landing to roost or breed in trees or on cliffs. They hold the flight speed record and have been recorded diving at 400km/h.

