



# JABIRU

NEWSLETTER OF THE MAREEBA WETLAND FOUNDATION -  
ISSUE 27 Winter 2004

*Founder and Honorary Chief Executive: Tim Nevard*

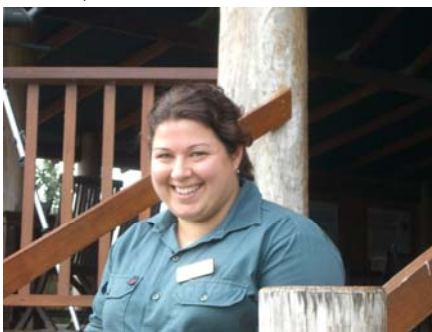
**Welcome** to Issue 27 of Jabiru. It has been a busy few months at the Reserve as it dries out after the wet season, and Ergon bring those power lines tantalisingly closer to the Visitor Centre. Because of the late Wet, we opened for the year on April 24<sup>th</sup> with the help of Wilderness Expeditions and their donkeys. Since then visitor numbers have been picking up with the approach of the peak season.

With Will recovered from his operation and on his way to South America, our new staff are in place. Craig Mills (below) is the new Reserve Warden, with



Julie Deleyev in the new position of Warden (Special Projects), with particular responsibility for the Gouldian Finches.

Both have a wide range of practical hands on conservation experience, and we look forward to seeing some of our new projects steam ahead under their enthusiastic direction. You will not miss them at the Visitor Centre, they are the busy guys in green!



We have already had some interesting visitors to the Reserve, of the human kind! In April we were lucky indeed to welcome Jo Davies and Shane Cormie enjoying a 3 week sabbatical from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in the UK. After the initial teething problems, such as the discovery that in fact Shane and Jo were not a couple and we hence had insufficient accommodation, and Jo finding she had to share her tent with Priscilla the



*Shane Cormie and Jo Davies from the RSPB*

possum, all was well, and Shane and Jo settled down to some serious hard work mopping floors and making coffee! Coming from an organisation with over a million members and 35 Reserves, it must have been quite a shock! They also assisted with some of our future planning and we look forward to continuing our good relationship with RSPB into the future.

In May, Andrea Mclintic, also from the UK, became our artist in residence for a few days, during which time she held an art class for members in still life sketching. We have had a number of enquiries from members interested in a regular art day at the Wetlands, of which more overleaf.



Our volunteer information morning in May brought us several new recruits, and we thank you all very much for your interest and support. Volunteer numbers on the books have now reached double figures! Several have already started their monthly visits to the Reserve, and have been hard at it making cups of coffee, talking to visitors, and clearing paths and tracks. Of course, we can always do with more help! Ring Craig or Julie to find out more.

WANTED!

2 regular volunteers to assist Julie with bird banding, mist netting and bird survey work. Training can be provided if no previous experience, but must be able to commit to a regular (weekly) programme of early starts! Phone Julie on 4093 2514.

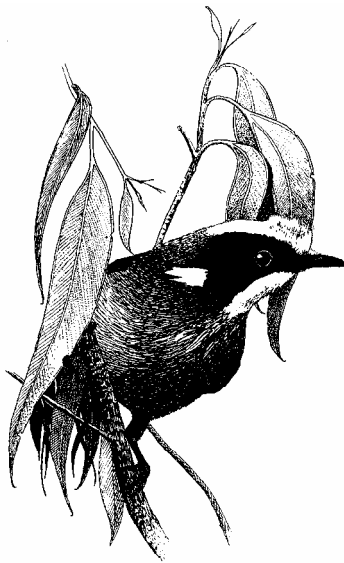
The early morning birding and morning tea on April 18<sup>th</sup> was a delightful occasion enjoyed by all who attended. Joe and Betty Penisi must be our oldest members and amazed us all by their fitness, whilst others enjoyed some good birding and especially the morning tea and chat afterwards. Thanks to all who took part and also helped in the kitchen!

Some upcoming events:

**Working Bee Saturday and Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> July** to clear and tidy up the Vine Thicket. Please ring Craig or Julie if you can help on one of these days. Morning tea will be provided for all willing helpers!

**Art Group Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> July 9am start.**

Our new Reserve Warden, Craig Mills, is, amongst other things, a wildlife illustrator. He is starting an art group at the Wetlands to meet and share skills and ideas as well as enjoy the scenic surrounds at the Wetlands. The first workshop will be on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> July from 9am at the Visitor Centre; please ring Craig if you would like to join in, as numbers will be limited. A nominal charge of \$5 will be made to members, \$10 for non members; bring your own materials. Please spread the word to local art groups, as many were disappointed to miss the last one.



**AGM.** Notice is hereby given of our AGM for 2004 which will be held at the Visitor Centre on **Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> August at 5.30pm.** All Mareeba Wetland Foundation members are invited to join us for a short meeting, followed by light refreshments. Further details are attached.

**Birding at the Wetlands**



A series of early morning birding walks and workshops with Warden Julie Deleyev, to encourage new and improving birders of all ages.

Julie has experience in bird expeditions and survey work, guiding, education, and an 'A' class banding licence. Help will be given in improving those birding skills, the minefield of classification, bird behaviour etc. Numbers will be limited, and on a first in basis, so please book your spot by phoning Julie at the Visitor Centre. A few pairs of binoculars are available for hire at the Visitor Centre if you do not currently own a pair.

Cost per session will be \$10 for members, \$20 for non members to include Reserve entry and morning tea. All except the Young Birders morning start at 8am at the Visitor Centre.

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> August Waterbirds** How to identify them and help us count our waterbirds.

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> August LBJs - Birds of the Bush** Identify those 'little brown jobs' by sight and call!

**Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> September Introduction to Bird Banding** Learn about basic banding techniques including mist netting, and what those different colour bands on birds actually mean.

**Friday 1<sup>st</sup> October 9am to 12pm Young Birders.** An introduction to birding for our younger members during the school holiday. A great morning for kids 8-14 years to learn more about birds and birding, and enjoy a morning in the bush. Cost \$8 pp including morning tea. (Parents may wish to enjoy some quiet birding or a peaceful coffee at the Visitor Centre!)

## **Wildlife Report**

With an extended Wet Season this year, most waterbirds are still dispersed inland. However, the landscape is beginning to dry up which will encourage many birds back to the Reserve. On the lagoons, waterbirds at present include mostly the resident population, such as Grebes, Jacanas (with chicks), Pygmy-geese, Coots, Swans, Cormorants and a few duck species. The Darter is still regularly seen, as are several species of Egrets, all roosting on their favourite perches. Flocks of hundreds of Red-tailed Black Cockatoos were seen flying in a northwesterly direction over Clancy and Pandanus Lagoons some evenings. Whiskered Terns and Black-winged Stilts have also been sighted on Clancy's, indicating the return of some birds. Brolgas and Sarus Cranes have not yet arrived, nor migratory waders, though the first airborne cranes of the year have just been spotted over Mareeba, so we don't believe they can be too far off..

Raptors are evident, with regular sightings of four out of the six species of Kites. A Peregrine Falcon is also regularly sighted over Clancy's Lagoon, as are Wedge-tailed Eagles. An immature White-bellied Sea-eagle made his appearance the other day and was seen to harass the masses of Eurasian Coots. It dived on them regularly but gave up an hour later, without catching his breakfast. A Pacific Baza has been seen on the Reserve, very distinct and striking with his crest and dark bars on the belly.

Bush birds (passerines) of interest have included plenty of Rainbow Bee-eaters with a flock of at least 400 seen on the Reserve, an amazing sight! Family groups of Grey-crowned Babblers and Apostlebirds are frequently sighted. White-throated Gerygones and Brown Treecreepers have been heard and Striated Pardalotes and Rufous Whistlers seen. A juvenile Olive-backed Oriole paid a visit to the Visitor Centre and liked it so much, he stayed for three days! All guests and volunteers who stay are of course expected to help out in the Reserve and the Oriole was no exception, doing a marvellous job of cleaning all the spiders and insects from under the central beam in the Visitor Centre!

A pair of Emus has been released on the Reserve after a long stay in our release pen, but we have been having some difficulty spotting their whereabouts. So anyone visiting the Wetlands soon, please keep a look out for them and help us keep track of them.

The unfeathered variety of flying animals includes many species of microbats. About 15-20 Eastern Horseshoe Bats hang upside down under the roof of the Visitor Centre every night, using this as a resting

and feeding roost. These bats feed on moths and insects, very much like flycatchers, and have short broad wings allowing maximum manoeuvrability. A rare species – the Large-footed Myotis Bat was recently caught and examined, it was a juvenile male using the rafters as a daytime roost. These bats are fish-eaters and feed on the lagoons by catching small fish across the surface of the water using their large feet. About 18 different species of forest bats also fly around at dusk around the wetlands!



*A forest bat (vespadelus sp) in flight*

Other mammals such as the Northern Quolls (small marsupials and ground predators that are easily recognised by white spots on their body) are doing well with young ones running about the Visitor Centre when the sun drops below the Hann Tableland. They are rather mischievous and getting into the kitchen and anything else they can find that might be a free feed. The rare arboreal Spot-tailed Quoll also occurs on the Reserve, but these tend to be harder to sight. They spend more time in trees and are excellent climbers, preying on birds and arboreal possums. They differ from the Northern Quoll by having spots also on their tail as well as their body and are larger in size. Bettongs, possums, wallabies, kangaroos and wallaroos are all occasionally seen mostly in the early evenings.

## **Gouldian Finches**

The breeding birds within the Warren Entsch Gouldian Finch Aviary are doing very well, and currently on another breeding attempt, possibly their final clutch within the 2003/2004 breeding season. Gouldian Finches may commonly lay two or three egg clutches within one breeding season. Sixteen young birds have recently fledged in the last couple of weeks, and another round of pink chicks have hatched with 11 at the last count and more to hatch any day. Those members who have visited the Visitor Centre at the Wetlands Reserve recently, would have noticed the new camera we have installed looking into one of the nest boxes, broadcasting live images and activities.

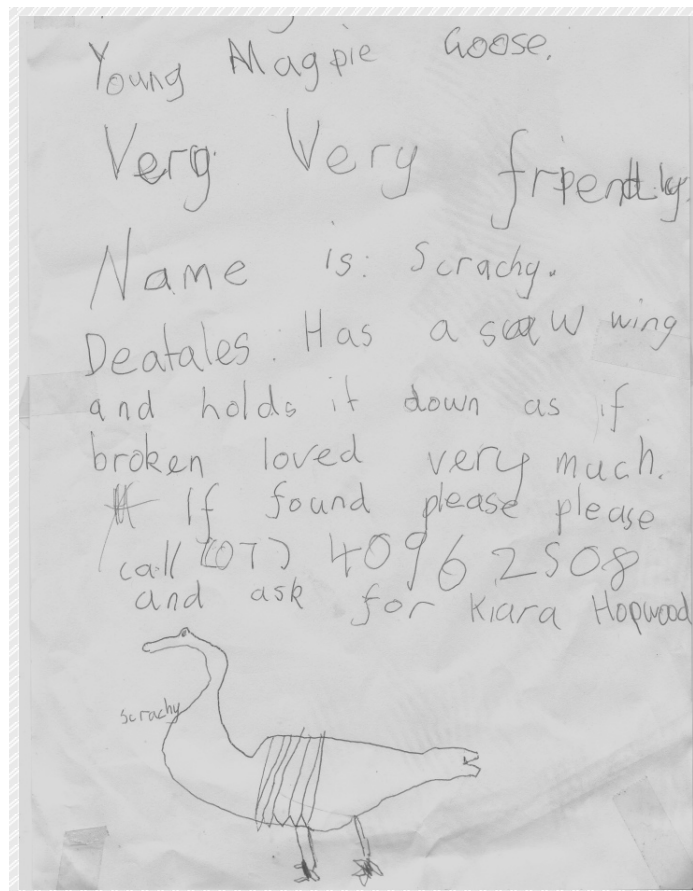
Five chicks have now hatched, so we will keep you updated on their progress.

With another Gouldian Finch release fast approaching, larger numbers are required to enhance the success rate of finch survival in the wild. A greater number of birds released means a lower predation risk, i.e. the old "safety in numbers" concept. No recent sightings (other than the sighting in December last year) have been recorded, however these birds are fairly nomadic and move around, so we may not see them again. Please keep an eye out however, as each bird is individually metal and colour banded. The combination of colour bands allows us to identify each individual bird, and if sighted in the wild, banding will allow us to monitor the success of each bird and gain valuable information on survival. If you have any information on Gouldian Finches in the area, please call us at the Visitor Centre!

The current focus is placing concerted efforts in restoring native grasses and in particular, the vital seed and food resources for the Gouldians and other granivorous (seed-eating) finches on the reserve. Thanks to a grant from WWF and the Threatened Species Network, work has now commenced. Since cattle were excluded from the reserve in late 2003, regeneration of native grasses is already apparent. Fire trials and burning regimes will be commencing very soon.

We continue to have a parade of wildlife through the release pen, several of whom seem to prefer the comfort of the Visitor Centre to life in the wild. The good news is that, however tame some of the wildlife

appears to be, they do all eventually return to the wild. For one of our young visitors, this was a sad story, but we shall treasure the letter she sent to us! Thanks Kiara...



Remember, if you are still receiving this by hard copy and have an email address, please let us know by emailing [info@mareebawetlands.com](mailto:info@mareebawetlands.com).



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