



JABIRU

NEWSLETTER OF THE MAREEBA WETLAND FOUNDATION
ISSUE 28 Spring 2004

Founder and President: Tim Nevard

Landmark Agreement with ABHF

We are delighted to announce that the Mareeba Wetland Foundation and the Australian Bush Heritage Fund are to form a conservation partnership. This agreement is to be formalised on the 4th November with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two organisations.



ABHF Director of Conservation Stuart Cowell, and Ecologist Murray Haseler visit the Reserve.

The ABHF is one of the largest land managing conservation bodies in Australia, with reserves all over the country in a huge variety climates and ecosystems, from tropical rainforest in the Daintree to subalpine conditions in Tasmania. For the Foundation this gives us access to the national conservation stage for the first time, plus the opportunity to plug into ABHF's nationally recognised conservation programs, volunteer networks and recruitment opportunities.

Welcome to the Reserve.

As the dry season sets in and visitor numbers to the region start to drop off, this really is a great time of year to visit the wetlands. Wildlife concentrates around the lagoons, sunsets are amazing, and staff become increasingly human as Christmas approaches.

As in previous years, we will be closing at the end of December, as accessibility to the Reserve along

Pickford Road becomes unreliable during the Wet Season months of January through to March. We will also be closed on Christmas Day.

We have several good news items this spring including our 'adopted' Emu chicks, progress on the safari camp, sponsorship for the Gouldian Finches, so read on! We also had a surprise visit from author Tim Low and his wife, who enjoyed themselves so much they came back for a second day, and our wardens tell me they were too busy talking to get their books signed by the author! And finally, don't miss our Members' picnic complete with champagne and sunset on Saturday 11th December.

Looking Ahead

Jabiru Camp: at long last our new tents have been erected and we can plan for the opening of Jabiru Camp next April. We await the arrival of furnishings, and power and water are in the process of being connected. Already two tour operators are incorporating us into their itineraries for next year. This is a great way to enjoy a night or two in the Australian outback, just an hour from Cairns or Port Douglas and do so in comfort! Each tent has its own verandah and ensuite bathroom.



We are also delighted to be working with Wilderness Expeditions on a new product for 2005, the *Pioneer Experience*, which includes a trek into the heart of the Reserve with pack donkeys and one or two nights stay in a bush camp. A great opportunity to learn some bush survival skills as taught by the Australian Army Survival School, and relive the experiences of the early pioneers. This is great fun for all the family, and bookings are being taken for 2005, either through the

Mareeba Wetland Foundation or Wilderness Expeditions.

AGM

The Foundation's AGM was held at the Visitor Centre on August 12th 2004. Our Board is now constituted as follows:

<i>President</i>	<i>Tim Nevard</i>
<i>Vice President</i>	<i>Trevor Adil</i>
<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Peter Apel</i>
<i>Members</i>	<i>Mick Borzi</i>
	<i>Philip Carr</i>
	<i>Col McDowall</i>
	<i>Mia Lacy</i>
	<i>Peter Sonntag</i>

Wildlife Report

Eastern Grey Kangaroos, Agile Wallabies and Rufous Bettongs are moving into the freshly burnt areas, the lagoon edges and the lawn to take advantage of the fresh green pick, the reserve drying quickly at the moment. A young male Agile Wallaby was seen munching heartily on burned grass and dry Cane Toads after a fire the evening before! The Eastern Grey Kangaroos and Agile Wallabies are pumping out the joeys at a great rate, with lots of big blinking eyes on out of control pogo stick legs hopping about.

Microbats are flying regularly now that the weather is starting to warm up. Not yet having the use of a Harp trap for identification, I could only admire their flight and ability to pinpoint insects during the twilight hours. One first year Gould's Wattleed Bat was seen roosting from the shade cloth on the Visitor Centre roof, its black maned buffalo head and shoulders contrasting with its rich brown body fur. If there is anyone out there that is interested in getting to know more about our furred flying friends first hand (they constitute a third of our mammal species) get in touch with Craig at the Visitor Centre.

Two of our guests found a dead male Common Planigale (a new record for the Reserve) while doing the Lagoon walk. It is one of our smallest carnivorous marsupials weighing in at a whopping 6-15 grams, and hunts for invertebrates among leaf litter and soil cracks. As in nearly all of our Dasyurid (carnivorous marsupials) all the males die just before their first birthday from stress related diseases after a frenzied breeding season. The largest Dasyurid on the Reserve is the Northern Quoll, and males of this species have been dropping like flies in the last couple of months with some sick looking post coital

'blokes' poking around the Visitor Centre at night with the hair falling out of their tails!

The resident Common Brushtail Possum has twin pouch young at the moment, which should emerge shortly. Sugar Gliders can still be heard yapping away through the night in the acacias and flowering paperbark and a Squirrel Glider has been seen in a Blue Gum near Mellick's Lagoon.

On the bird front, the dry season has fully hit and the lagoons are teeming with waterbirds once more. This, of course, means new episodes of "Days of Our Lives" soap opera in the animal world - with no television, the staff watch with interest the activities of the birds and wildlife on Clancy's Lagoon!

The first Brolgas were seen on Pandanus Lagoon in late June with numbers of about 60-80 birds arriving a month ago. A few juvenile Brolgas and Sarus Cranes have been easily spotted around the lagoons, which may suggest that there has been quite a good breeding season this year. The annual crane count took place at the beginning of October, with the Wetlands counting 193 cranes. As in past years, the majority of cranes were Brolgas. This is a very small count for us, but mirrored results over the region where the arrival of large numbers of cranes has been late. It was interesting that there were already 50 or so birds on Pandanus Lagoon in the mid afternoon, making it a great spot for guests on the Twilight Safari.

It was a glorious afternoon to spend in the birdhide on the western side of Pandanus, entertained by dancing cranes, two mobs of Eastern Greys, birds of prey including a White-bellied Sea Eagle fishing over the water, and close by, the bush birds busy with their bedtime routine.

Pandanus Lagoon has also yielded a few interesting breeding records including a pair of Square-tailed Kites - a species not very common around these parts, with one chick fledged! A Black-necked Stork (Jabiru) pair has also produced two large grey-brown juveniles, first seen on Sunday 1st August during a members' event! The juveniles are beginning to colour up and gain their striking black and white adult plumage and can still be seen together in Jacana Bay, the sheltered southern side of Pandanus Lagoon.

Around the Visitor Centre, we've had a regular vocal visitor, misidentified at first! Occasionally, we had been hearing the call of a Whistling Kite near the Gouldian Finch aviary but upon closer examination, it was found to be a Great Bowerbird! Along with their usual explosive hiss, Bowerbirds are superb at mimicry. Bowerbirds, Olive-backed Orioles and

Channel-billed Cuckoos are attracted by the fruiting figs, and flowering Grevilleas and Callistemons are currently attracting Red-winged Parrots, Lorikeets and many honeyeaters. The early arrival of Channel-billed Cuckoos has unsettled some of the honeyeaters!



The wetlands have also gained some new inhabitants, including the arrival of two young Emu chicks and several Brush Turkeys. The Foundation works quite closely with wildlife carers and animals are often brought to be released, wherever the Reserve lies within their natural range. The Emu chicks have been given to us to rear - luckily our male emu has adopted them and he is doing a great job!

Gouldian Finches

We were very excited to receive a report that a flock of Gouldian Finches had been spotted by reputable birders along Big Mitchell Creek, just north of the Reserve. Experienced birdwatchers and members of the Cumberland Bird Club from NSW saw four adult birds and up to 16 juveniles. The sighting is the first confirmed sighting outside the Reserve in suitable habitat and provides hope that we have established a breeding population in the area after an absence of 20 years.

We received further good news in September that HARMONY Wild Birdseed (manufacturers of Trill and other bird seed) will support our Gouldian Finch reintroduction and assist with the cost of maintaining the captive breeding program, as well as donating birdseed for our use. A big thanks is due to Harmony for their support.



We are also excited about the donation of Gouldian Finches captive-bred from a wild population in the Northern Territory. These birds are being subjected to stringent health checks before being relocated to the Reserve in order to augment our captive-breeding population. As the NT birds are of wild provenance, they offer several advantages in our

release program, including increased predator awareness, improved disease resistance and genetic variability. The birds are due to arrive towards the end of the year.

Our own captive flock had a more disappointing breeding season with some 40 juveniles fledging, possibly due to overcrowding in the aviaries at the Visitor Centre. This will be avoided in 2005, as we now have an additional large and luxurious aviary to accommodate more breeding pairs and increase the numbers for release.

Freshwater Crocodiles

Freshwater crocodiles *Crocodylus johnstoni*, will also be reintroduced into the Reserve in the next few months in a co-operative project with QPWS and JCU. The first release will be into Clancy's Lagoon with the objective of establishing a natural population of the peak north Queensland freshwater predator. There are no wild populations remaining within the upper catchment of the Mitchell River close enough to naturally colonise the Reserve. The crocodiles will come from within the Mitchell River catchment and will improve the ecological balance within our freshwater ecosystem and continue to enhance our biodiversity, education and nature-tourism values.

Volunteer News

Our small hardworking band of volunteers have been doing an excellent job helping in the Visitor Centre, mowing lawns, repairing channels, and assisting in wildlife surveys and bird counts. We cannot thank them enough.



Volunteers Chris, Lisa, Rebecca and Dave rock pitching on the Panama Canal above Clancy's Lagoon.

Our volunteers Christmas BBQ will be held on Sunday 19th December. If you are one of our volunteers, please keep this date free, more information will be sent to you shortly.

Earthwatch are offering a fantastic opportunity for a volunteer to join the project run by QPWS on Hawksbill Turtles located at Milman Island on the GBR from 21st January to 1st February. All costs will be met by Earthwatch, and interested volunteers should apply by 15th November to Natalie Falzon, Earthwatch Institute, 126 Bank Street, South Melbourne VIC 3205, programassist-au@earthwatch.org

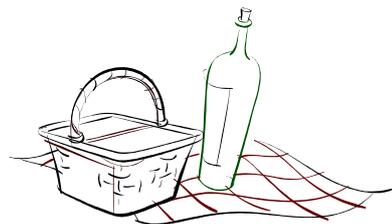
Members News



Our birding mornings for members this winter were well attended and were, I understand, enjoyed by all. Good bird data was collected during these mornings, but more help would be useful in maintaining our wildlife database, so if you would like to help with surveys at any time, either with one of the wardens or on your own, give Craig or Julie a call. We will be running another series of birding workshops next year, so look out for more details.

You are invited! We will be holding a **Members Picnic on Saturday 11th December.** Forget the Christmas shopping for a few hours, and join us for an afternoon picnic with

champagne and sunset at the Lookout, spotlighting for wildlife on your return to the Visitor Centre. You will need a spotlight or good torch, and a rug or mat



to sit on. All our members and their families are welcome, but for catering purposes please ring the Visitor Centre to let us know if you can join us. Cost to members: \$15pp, including light picnic fare and glass of champagne, or \$50 per family. We can only cater for a small group and preference will be given to members booking before 15th November. Non-members are \$25pp. Wine/beer/soft drinks will also be available. Meet at the Visitor Centre at 4pm. RSVP Craig or Julie on 4093 2514.

Cotton Pygmy-geese Survey



A Cotton Pygmy-geese survey in the region has been instigated by Birds Australia and coordinated by Julie at the Wetlands

to try and assess the current size and status of populations and the favoured breeding habitat. These birds are listed as near threatened with a breeding population of only 3000-5000 but reliability of this data is low. We are asking all members to keep records of sightings and numbers, which will be incorporated into a database at the Wetlands.

If you happen to be near a wetland or dam, please make an effort to search and count the Cotton Pygmy-geese. Information about whether these birds are absent in a particular location is just as valuable as their presence, so all data is encouraged! If you are interested in future CPG counts (or counts of all waterbirds around the wetlands), please call Julie on 4093 2514 or email visitor.centre@mareebawetlands.com.



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