



# JABIRU

NEWSLETTER OF THE MAREEBA WETLAND FOUNDATION -  
ISSUE 26 Wet Season 2004

*Mareeba Wetland Foundation Founder and Chief Executive: Tim Nevard*

**Welcome** to the Wet Season 2004 edition of *Jabiru*. And what a wet season it is turning out to be. With the rain, and the cattle removed from the core area of the Reserve, we have never seen so much grass and so many kangaroos – it should be a great year for wildlife!

If you have email and did not receive this electronically, please let us know by confirming your email address to [info@mareebawetlands.com](mailto:info@mareebawetlands.com) and we will add you to our mailing list. This is a great saver in time, paper and postage, so help us help the environment!

## **Members News**



### *Steve Cale's wildlife workshop*

UK bird artist Steve Cale was our artist in residence last October/November, and during his stay held a workshop for members on bird sketching. Steve is in great demand for his birding and sketching workshops with conservation organisations in the UK so we were lucky to hold one here in Australia. The day was a great success, with all places taken and several people disappointed. Steve is also producing a body of artwork for us to use depicting some of the birdlife in the Reserve, which will be on sale at the Visitor Centre shop this year.

### *Pickford Road Plantings*



*MWF members planting out the Ergon sponsored trees along Pickford Road.*

At the end of February we held a members tree planting morning, sponsored by Ergon Energy. The 1000 or so trees have been provided by Ergon as a remedial groundwater forest planting as part of their environmentally responsible mandate. Although only a few trees had to be cleared to make way for the new power line, the new planting will greatly improve the Pickford Road drive in to the Reserve. A mixed species planting of Leichhardt trees, Blue Gums, Moreton Bay Ash, Swamp Mahogany, Weeping Paperbarks and Poplar Gums has now begun. Many thanks to the few volunteers who braved the waters of Two Mile Creek (and the Saltwater Crocodile which currently inhabits this creek!), we really appreciated your help!

### *Upcoming events for members:*

**Sunday April 18<sup>th</sup>**. An early morning of birding, morning tea and informal talk on the birds of the Mareeba Wetlands by Reserve Warden. Will Goulding. This will of course be free to members, so come and enjoy some early season birding and a slap up morning tea! Meet at the Visitor Centre from 7.30am, morning tea from 10.30am. Please join us. It would assist for catering purposes if you could let

us know by Friday 16<sup>th</sup> if you are coming and the numbers in your group. In the event of very wet weather please phone the Visitor Centre for confirmation of road conditions.

Also coming up: on **Sunday May 9<sup>th</sup>** is another sketching day. Professional artist Andrea McLintic will be running a still life sketching workshop. As before, numbers will be limited and a small charge of \$35 per person will be made for the day to include morning and afternoon tea, discounted for members to \$25. If you would like further information, please contact the Visitor Centre; bookings can be made by phoning the Visitor Centre or emailing [info@mareebawetlands.com](mailto:info@mareebawetlands.com), so get your name down early.

Last but not least, memberships for 2004 are now due. There will be no increase in the cost of annual membership, which is staying at \$22 per person, \$55 per family, and \$85 for Friends of the Mareeba Wetlands. Please complete the renewal slip and post it to the Foundation. Electronic payments can also be made, but we still require the form either by phone, fax or email. If you do not receive a renewal form then this is because you joined in the latter part of 2003, and your membership carries forward to the end of 2004. If you have any queries, please contact Gwyneth Nevard on 0408 932303 or email [info@mareebawetlands.com](mailto:info@mareebawetlands.com).

At this stage, we are still planning to re-open the Reserve on Wednesday April 7<sup>th</sup>, but this is subject to weather conditions and the safety of Pickford Road access.

### ***Safari Camp***

Wet weather has hampered progress on the construction of the Safari Camp. Ergon have had to postpone the erection of poles and connection of power until drier conditions, and the new safari tents cannot be erected until the ground dries out. We still anticipate that we will be able to take our first guests towards the end of the year.



*On safari with pack donkeys!*

### ***New Tourism Venture***

We are delighted to be joining forces with Tim Daniels and John Hopwood of Wilderness Expeditions to offer a new product at the wetlands starting in April. The new Wetlands Walkabout is a guided walk experience through the Reserve with pack donkeys to carry all the gear and refreshments. This promises to be a leisurely and enjoyable alternative to exploring the Reserve. To find out more, phone the Visitor Centre once we are open or contact Wilderness Expeditions on 4096 2266.



*Morning tea on a Wetlands Walkabout*

### ***Staff News and Employment Opportunities***

It is with great sadness that we shall be saying farewell to Reserve Warden Will Goulding at the end of April. Will has been with us for two and a half years, and during this time has developed an impressive knowledge of the Reserve's wildlife, welcomed many thousands of visitors to the Reserve and progressed several of the conservation projects. He has been particularly closely involved with the Gouldian Finches and I am sure the little birds are going to miss him! He is planning to spend some time working on conservation projects overseas, indeed places as far apart as Surinam or Alaska have both been mentioned! But he has promised to stay in touch and come back to check up on the birds when he is back in Cairns. Thank you Will, we have all enjoyed working with you, and we wish you an exciting career move!

In the meantime the Foundation is seeking a new Reserve Warden. The position is live in (there is self contained simple accommodation at the Visitor Centre). The hours are long and the salary small, but it is a wonderful opportunity for someone wishing to develop a career in conservation and nature based tourism. We shall also be recruiting a casual full time Assistant Warden. We particularly welcome applications from couples seeking to fill both these positions. Further information and position descriptions can be obtained by emailing Gwyneth

Nevard at [info@mareebawetlands.com](mailto:info@mareebawetlands.com) or phoning 0408 932303.

**Ever thought about volunteering?** We are always in need of more people to join our small but enthusiastic team! Jobs can range from helping in the Visitor Centre to assisting with more specialised tasks such as the bird surveys and the annual Crane Count. All training is provided on site. If you can help – even if it is for as little as one day per month – please email us: [info@mareebawetlands.com](mailto:info@mareebawetlands.com)

### **Wildlife Report**

With a few good rainfall events in December and January, a shift has occurred in the species composition seen on the Reserve. In previous years we have had bird species arrive on the reserve that you would not typically expect in this sort of landscape; for example Azure Kingfishers and Spectacled Monarchs.

This year it has included Eastern Yellow Robins. One poor bird was mercilessly harassed by Leaden Flycatchers concerned by the new arrival cutting into their piece of the pie. The male Leaden Flycatchers have been showing some fantastic breeding behaviour. Several males will concentrate in an area noisily challenging each other under the watchful eye of a female. When things get really heated, the males fly up flipping against each other, rising above the canopy. It appears to be both a display and a vertical competition.



*Rufous Whistler photographed on the Reserve*

Other birds of interest have included plenty of Cuckoos. Horsfields Bronze Cuckoos, Little Bronze Cuckoos and Oriental Cuckoos have been fairly frequently seen. A young Channel-billed Cuckoo was found dead on January 21<sup>st</sup> underneath a Magpie nest. It was well developed and would have been getting close to fledging. Perhaps the hosts are currently one up in this evolutionary battle and recognized the freeloader.

Waterbirds on the lagoons have mostly dispersed. We still have Great-crested Grebes, Jacanas, Cormorants and a few other species. The resident Darter, which I am sure is one of the most photographed birds in north Queensland, is looking fairly pathetic at the moment. It is moulting its wing feathers and currently lacks all primary, secondary and many other wing feathers. When it dries out after exiting the water, it makes you wonder why it bothers holding out these two featherless sticks!

QPWS have provided us with two remote cameras in order to obtain photographs of the Buff Breasted Button-quail. Following the reduction in grazing pressure they have been calling in larger numbers than ever this year. However there appear to be a few technical hitches before we can obtain that elusive photograph!

Rainfall and warm weather has spurred reptile and amphibian activity to its annual peak. This has included: Frill-necked Lizards; Velvet Geckoes (*Oedura castelnaui*); Fat-tailed Geckoes (*Diplodactylus conspicillatus*); *Diplodactylus steindachneri*; the unusual *Varanus tristis* (Goanna) that we get on the Reserve; Black Whipsnakes (*Demansia atra*); lots of Water Pythons (*Liasis fuscus*); Carpet Pythons (*Morelia spilota*); and some of the great frog species we only see at this time of year such as the burrowing *Cyclorana novaehollandiae*.



*The Mareeba Wetlands Varanus 'tristis'!*

This time of year is also good for insects. We have a great diversity that does include more than just mosquitoes! The rains cause an eruption of winged termites (alates) that form an important source of food for so many of our reptiles, amphibians and

birds. Many insectivorous birds breed at this time and use the boom in insects to meet their stretched resource requirements. Some species considered predominantly seed-eaters also appear to use insects to get themselves through this tough time of year when many grasses have yet to produce seed.

The biomass of this resource really has to be seen to be appreciated. After recent afternoon storms, Little Friarbirds, Noisy Friarbirds, Lemon-bellied Flycatchers, Striated Pardalotes and White-bellied Cuckoo Shrikes were all seen catching termites on the wing from one eucalypt tree.

### ***Gouldian Finches***

As mentioned in our last issue, we are currently working with the birds to breed as many as possible so that we may release larger numbers. Good news is that some of our birds released on May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2003 were seen at the end of December. This gives us real hope that we are on the right track. These birds have survived for close to 8 months out in the wild. It is interesting that for more than six months, these particular birds have evaded detection.

We are also really excited to have a project approved to improve native grass areas on the Reserve for the Gouldian Finches. This is the Threatened Species Network and WWF grant for grassland rehabilitation for granivorous birds, and involves us working with TREAT who will propagate the grass species. So 2004 should be an interesting year for wildlife. Without grazing for the first time, many of the grasses will have the opportunity to set seed and will dramatically alter the quality of habitat on the Reserve.

### ***New Panels for Visitor Centre***

We have received a grant from the Gambling Community Benefit Fund to provide some interpretive material in the Visitor Centre. Six new Interpretive panels are currently under construction depicting, in all, 24 of the bird species which are seen regularly in the Reserve, using illustrations from HANZAB which were kindly approved by Birds Australia and the artists. A seventh panel will illustrate some of the aquatic plants. These panels will be in place in time for the commencement of the busy winter months.

*The Mareeba Wetland Foundation is very grateful to the Tablelands Advertiser for supporting this newsletter.*



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