

Wetlands Now Open

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The Mareeba Wetlands are open for another season after a below average rainfall over the Wet.

Opening plans, however, were put on hold when, at the beginning of March, Gwyneth Nevard, Reserve Manager and general organiser extraordinaire, had an accident on a tractor and broke her back! After a lot of pinning and gluing and sticking her vertebrate back together, Gwyneth is on the road to recovery.

In the mean time, Lisa Collins has agreed to stay on as Warden and has managed to organise a group of



Wetlands now open!

dedicated volunteers to assist her in the Visitor Centre. The Conservancy would like to extend its deepest appreciation and thanks to all volunteers who have assisted at the Reserve through this period.

Buttonquails

Twenty three volunteers from around Australia and the world participated in the WCTQ's Buff-breasted Buttonquail Conservation Project. Funding was provided by the Australian Government's Envirofund and the Norman Wettenhall Foundation.

1275 hours over three months were spent looking for these highly endangered birds. Of the approximately 200 'buttonquail' that were flushed during surveys, eight were identified as Buffies.

The project will continue over the next two seasons and attempts to



Barbara, Lisa and Kathy after a wet trap run

try and trap the birds for radio-tracking before the wet season starts will commence in December. All help is welcome and anyone interested should contact Lisa Collins on 07 4093 2514 or email visitorcentre@mareebawetlands.com

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Gouldians through the wet

By David Hickling, Volunteer Reserve Warden



Volunteer Wet Season Warden David Hickling assisting with banding pre release



Taking advantage of the soft release



Checking out the new boxes



A big thank you to Cairns Tropical Zoo for their support

In August 2006 I came across an advertisement at the British Birdwatching Fair for a caretaker warden position at the Mareeba Wetlands whilst they were closed for the wet season. Well I'm now sitting back here in Blighty, pondering the last three months. One of the main tasks I was responsible for was the care of the Gouldian finches ...

Prior to my arrival, a number of finches had already been released and these were supplemented by new releases during the first two to three weeks of my stay. I spent at least one hour every day watching the finches around the release site and was fascinated by the way they learned to survive. As well as the Gouldians, there was a large flock of double-barred finches around the release site and both kinds of finches associated with each other.

In the first few weeks, whenever a threat appeared, the double-barred finches immediately flew to cover, whilst most of the Gouldians had a quick look round to see what all the fuss was about and continued as they were. Gradually the survivors started showing signs that they were learning the ways of the wild and in

no time were fleeing to cover just as fast as the others. This "study period" came to an abrupt end with the onset of the one week wet season. The first week or so of February saw a bit of a deluge at the wetlands and made watching the birds very difficult.

The most interesting thing, however, was that when the weather let up and I returned to make my daily observations I couldn't find any birds. They had all seemed to disappear. We weren't sure what had happened – had they all succumbed to the wet weather? Had a sparrowhawk had a party and invited all his mates? Or had they just dispersed? I spent some time after this patrolling the local area trying to locate any Gouldians and did manage to find a small flock that were associating with a group of black-throated finches. The birds in this flock were as nervous at my presence as the black-throated finches.

Some of these birds were still making appearances at the end of my stay and certainly gave me hope for the future.

More on Gouldians

The Gouldians have again benefited from the Freeman Family and their conservation fund, the North Queensland Wildlife Trust. Cairns Tropical Zoo staff have donated 20 nest boxes for the Gouldian Finch Reintroduction Programme.

Not to be outdone, volunteers over the summer also constructed an additional 40 nest boxes including the very imaginative 'dormitory' which looks like four nest boxes stuck together, each with their own private entrance.

Wildlife Report



No binoculars needed to see this guy!



Juvenile Tawny Frogmouth



The imposing backdrop to Hong Kong Wetland Park

With the waterbirds all gone again for the wet season, the bushbirds once again became the focus of our binoculars and you didn't have to go tramping through the bush to see them.

Binoculars weren't needed for a fantastic view of a juvenile **White-bellied Sea Eagle** (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) that just kept getting closer while we all busily took photos: first resting on the jetty and then resting on the verandah railing on the Visitor Centre deck!

Some birds take a little more time and patience to get that perfect shot. Every wet season a **Black Bittern** (*Ixobrychus flavicollis*) takes up residence at the causeway of Four-mile Creek (the second creek crossing on your way into the Reserve) and can usually be seen stalking the shallows of the outflow for fish. Black Bitterns are one of the easier bitterns to see as they are often active during the morning and afternoon; bitterns are usually nocturnal. Found mostly in coastal and wet tropical areas, these birds are partially migratory with northern individuals disappearing at the onset of the dry to breed.

Another sight along Pickford Rd that had staff and volunteers with

binoculars trained to their eyes was the raising of a **Channel-billed Cuckoo** (*Scythrops novaehollandiae*) by a pair of dedicated **Australian Magpies** (*Gymnorhina tibicen*). Nestlings of this cuckoo do not evict the eggs of the host when they hatch. They just grow faster and demand more food thus starving out their 'siblings'. The Channel-billed Cuckoo is a migratory species that breeds in Australia and then travels to New Guinea and Indonesia for the non-breeding season.

Another bird that was busy breeding on the Reserve over the wet was the **Tawny Frogmouth** (*Podargus strigoides*). A fluffy nestling was spotted on the drive in and posed for photo opportunities.

It wasn't just birds that provided easy viewing opportunities. Reptiles were relishing the hot and humid weather and many snakes were spotted over the course of the wet. **Keelback** or **Freshwater Snakes** (*Tropidonophis mairii*) were seen regularly close to the waters edge. Described as being a ready biter, though not poisonous, these snakes prey on small reptiles and amphibians; even young cane toads!

WetlandLink International

Conservancy staff member Lisa Collins recently spoke at an international conference developing links and communication between wetland centres throughout Asia. The three day conference was held at the newly opened, \$500million Hong

Kong Wetland Park and was attended by over 80 people from 19 countries.

Lisa spoke about public and private sector partnerships in wetland management using the Mareeba Wetlands as a case study.

**Members
Special**

The Wildlife Conservancy of Tropical Queensland relies on support from its members to operate, expand and undertake essential conservation activities.

To show our appreciation of this support the Conservancy is offering members a 25% discount on overnight accommodation at Jabiru Safari Camp, breakfast included, for all stays until the end of June. This

means that it will only cost you \$138.75 per couple per night and you can enjoy the stunning sunsets and the peaceful atmosphere of the Reserve at the best times of the day. Please contact the Visitor Centre and book early to take advantage of this special.



Enjoy a night at Jabiru Camp for 25% off

Hot off the Press



The Wildlife Conservancy of Tropical Queensland is in the process of letting the tourism (day visitors and overnight accommodation) at the Mareeba Tropical Savanna and Wetland Reserve as a concession.

An ecotourism concession will allow the Conservancy to concentrate its resources on its core biodiversity conservation functions and regional development, whilst continuing to

provide high quality day visitor and accommodation experience for its members. It is currently seeking expressions of interest from operators with the capacity to continue to raise the profile of the Reserve and develop Jabiru Safari Camp as one of the premier ecotourism products in tropical Queensland.

Did you know.....? Tawny Frogmouths (*Podargus strigoides*) are the most widespread of all frogmouths. Although they are a nocturnal bird, they are in the nightjar family and are more closely related to kookaburras and kingfishers than to owls. Frogmouths are mostly insectivorous and may hunt from a low perch or by sitting on ground and snatching insects as they fly past. They also eat snails, slugs, worms, and sometimes small mammals, birds and reptiles. They are also particularly good at pretending to be dead bits of wood.



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