

Issue 32

Wet Season 2006

JABIRU

Newsletter of the Mareeba Wetland Foundation

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Wildlife Award for Mareeba Wetlands



Gwyneth Nevard with Vice President of the Wildlife Preservation Society Dr Clive Williams (left) and the Premier of NSW Hon Morris Iemma MP.

We are delighted to announce that the Mareeba Wetland Foundation was the winner of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia's Community Conservation award for 2005.

The award was made on 20 February at a gala luncheon at Parliament House in Sydney by the Premier of NSW, Hon Morris Iemma MP. This prestigious award is a wonderful reward for all the hard work put in by so many people and a great way to celebrate our first 10 years.

The success of the Mareeba Wetlands has been based on generous contributions of many people since 1995. Past and present Board members, staff, Foundation members, thousands of visitors, sponsors and donors, and of course the wonderful volunteers, without whom the Wetlands could not succeed. We would therefore like to

take this opportunity to thank you all.

Other good news – Jabiru Camp has been ranked No. 2 in Australia's Top 10 Luxury Camping Sites by travel website www.escape.com.au – camping locations for those who "have a soft spot for luxury but don't want to miss out on the exotic". So make your booking early for 2006!



Volunteers Viv & Peter Sonntag were also at Parliament House



Gambling Community Benefit Fund Grant



Pickford Road in January 2005!



Warden Tim Gale on the new tractor purchased with funds from the Queensland Government's Gambling Community Benefit Fund

As in previous years, we closed on Christmas Eve for the Wet Season months of January to March. Since then, we have been left wondering if indeed we are going to have a Wet Season at all this year. It remains a busy time of year for us, with maintenance, mowing, feral animal and weed control, wildlife surveys, painting and cleaning and funding applications, as well as some well earned staff holidays.

This year we have been aided by a grant of \$29466 from the Queensland Government's Gambling Community Benefit Fund, allowing us to purchase a small

Kubota tractor (see picture below left!). This tractor has already been put to good use in maintaining fire breaks and carrying out repairs to tracks and roads, and we thank the fund for their generosity in funding this purchase.

Funded by



Gambling

Community Benefit Fund

Queensland Government

We plan to re-open on Wednesday April 5, weather permitting!✳

Wildlife Report

Promises of a heavy wet season are still yet to be fulfilled. An average wet season at the Reserve sees approximately 1000ml of rain fall. With less than 200ml of rain recorded for the first half of 'the wet', we are waiting in anticipation of the deluge that is to come.

The wet season is a time of reproduction and growth in the tropical savanna. The lack of rain has not hindered attempts by the Reserve's plants and animals to maximise their chances of passing their genes on to the next generation. Plants that have been dormant for the last eight months have exploded into a million shades of green with fruits and flowers appearing everywhere.

This eruption of growth is most noticeable in the Reserve's grass species. Areas of bare and burnt ground are now towers of seed heads swaying above densely clumped stalks and leaves that have erupted from the seed bank of annuals in the surface layers of the soil or from perennials that lay dormant through 'the dry'.

The early stages of the wet season are the most critical for the survival of the Reserve's seed eating birds such as finches, mannikins, doves and pigeons, as well as less observed species such as button-quail. After the first rains, the majority of the available seed in the soil starts to germinate leaving little for seed-eating birds. At this time,

most of these species alter their diet to include insects, in particular the millions of termite alates (the winged, reproductives of termite society) that are released after the first respectable rains of the season. Many of these birds breed on the Reserve and rely on the ingestion of these protein-rich creatures to reach breeding condition at an otherwise food-scarce time of year.

The Reserve's bushbirds are the most obvious of the animals that breed here during the wet season and the casual observer can easily discover nest sites. Displays and vocalisations by parents draw attention to the fact there is nesting in the area rather than deter or distract from it. A little



Wet Season growth



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MARCH 19 – SUNDAY

Working Bee
VISITOR CENTRE
9:00am start

MARCH 25 - SATURDAY

Working Bee
VISITOR CENTRE
9:00am start

APRIL 5TH – WEDNESDAY

Reserve Opens

APRIL 8 – SATURDAY

VOLUNTEERS TRAINING DAY

VISITOR CENTRE
10:00AM -4.00 PM

APRIL 9TH – SUNDAY

7.00AM
BIRD SURVEY

APRIL 29 - SATURDAY

SPONSOR'S EVENING

VISITOR CENTRE
5.00 PM

MAY 14 – SUNDAY

MOTHERS' DAY
7.00AM BIRD SURVEY
OPEN DAY VISITOR CENTRE
10:00 – 4:00PM

JUNE 11TH - SUNDAY

7.00AM
BIRD SURVEY

FOR NOTING –

AUGUST 4-6
MAREEBA HERITAGE
MUSEUM/MAREEBA WETLANDS
Bush Poetry Festival 2006 -
Evening BBQ and live
entertainment Saturday 5th.

Members News

Yes, it is time to dig deep and renew your membership for 2006. (This does not apply to those who joined after 1 September 2005). We are pleased to be able to keep the cost of membership to previous levels for yet another year.

We really value your continued support at this time of year as with the three month closure, our income drops to an all time low, whilst our expenditure on reserve maintenance in particular remains high. Therefore please help us by renewing promptly, either by mail or on-line. This will also ensure you have your 2006 membership card in good time for the Reserve opening.

All members who renew before the end of March will receive a complimentary voucher to bring along a friend to the Reserve and enjoy a free cup of our local Mareeba coffee or tea.

Become a member and have 5000 acres of tranquility in your backyard!

Generous Donation

We are extremely grateful to the Freeman Family of Cairns Tropical Zoo, Kuranda Koala Gardens, and Hartley's Creek Crocodile Adventures for their generous donation to the Foundation from the North Queensland Wildlife Trust, with support from the Kuranda Information Centre. The private trust was established by the Freeman Family to raise funds for local conservation. The money will especially be used to help fund the Gouldian Finch reintroduction programme.

Speaking of which, the finches in the aviaries are well into the breeding season, currently there are some 123 eggs being incubated! ✕



Gwyneth Nevard accepts the donation on behalf of MWF from Peter Freeman

Tenth Birthday!

2006 marks ten years since the Mareeba Wetland Foundation was incorporated, so look out for news of our celebrations later in the year!



Learning the arcane art of flyfishing at the Mareeba Wetlands

One of our most popular events for 2005 was the Introduction to Fly Fishing, so look out for more fly fishing opportunities this year.

The Bush Poetry Festival was such a success that we have had to seek Council's support and move the competition part of the 2006 event to the Mareeba Heritage Museum, though the evening bbq and "Laughter and Tears from the Bush" on Saturday 5th August will again be held round the campfire at the Mareeba Wetlands.

For all current and prospective volunteers, our training day on Saturday 8th April promises to be fact-filled and fun, and will cover a range of topics from customer service, Reserve history, fauna and flora, to experiencing the tours and more! Morning tea and lunch provided, with drinks at the end of the day for those who last the course! So bring along a friend and a notebook and all those questions you have been longing to ask!

patience is often rewarded with the discovery of the nest itself or of glimpses of the chicks. If you are a predator then parental harassment will alert you to nesting nearby and the possible chance of an easy meal- an incident that happened to a **Willie Wagtail** (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) pair and a hungry possum outside the Warden's quarters.



Willie Wagtail nest made from grass,

In order to attract a mate you have to advertise your availability. In the Reserve, no species does this with more enthusiasm and patience than the **Brush Cuckoo** (*Cuculus variolosus*). Confined to the northern and eastern edges of the continent, males of this species emit a monotonous, mournful descending scale repeatedly! Cuckoos are notorious for their repetitive songs that can be heard throughout the breeding season (Dec-Mar). Our male Brush Cuckoo can be heard calling for a mate all day and all night- even over the air conditioning. Being of the cuckoo family, parent cuckoos do not

raise their own young. The female Brush Cuckoo lays her eggs in the nests of birds that construct open nests, such as small honeyeaters and flycatchers.

The enormous amount of activity that is going on in the bush is in stark contrast to what is happening on the water. Although representatives of most of the waterbird species that can be seen at the Reserve can be found throughout the year, the majority of birds disperse with the rains leaving the lagoons on the Reserve devoid of much of its dry season bird abundance and diversity. A few waterbirds do breed on the lagoons, most noticeably **Pandanus Lagoon**, during the wet season. Early wet season breeders include **Comb-crested Jacana** (*Metopidius gallinaceus*), **Black-winged Stilt** (*Himantopus himantopus leucocephalus*) and **Masked Lapwing** (*Vanellus miles miles*).

Despite the lack of bird numbers on the lagoons, there are some waterbird sightings worth noting.

Large numbers of **Black Swans** (*Cygnus atratus*) have been passing through the Reserve on their way to greener pastures. Two hundred and forty four were counted on Clancy's Lagoon one evening only to be gone the next morning. Migratory waders have also been sighted regularly on Pandanus Lagoon. These birds prefer the open muddy shallow edges of Pandanus Lagoon to the steeper and more vegetated banks of Clancy's. Species include **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** (*Calidris acuminata*), **Wood Sandpiper** (*Tringa glareola*), **Marsh Sandpiper** (*Tringa stagnatilis*) and **Red-necked Stint** (*Calidris ruficollis*).



Lemon-bellied Flycatcher (*Microeca flavigaster*) on a nest



Black-winged Stilt

DID YOU KNOW...?

The **Gouldian Finch** (*Erythrura gouldiae*) is one species that does not partake in the termite glut of the early wet season. Gouldians are strict granivores (seed-eaters) and the early wet season is a difficult time for them. However, it doesn't take long for the first grasses to germinate and come to seed. One of the most important grass species for the Gouldian at that time is the native **Cockatoo Grass** (*Alloteropsis semialata*) as it is one of the first to develop edible seeds. This grass is abundant on the Reserve, especially in areas that were burnt in the previous year. The Mareeba Wetland Foundation is working with Queensland's Department of Primary Industries in investigating the suitability of using Cockatoo Grass in native grassland restoration projects.

Regional Conservation Initiative

The Mareeba Wetland Foundation is delighted to form part of a new force in regional conservation. The soon to be launched Wildlife Conservancy of The Mareeba Wetland Foundation is delighted to form part of a new force in regional conservation. The soon to be launched Wildlife Conservancy of Tropical Queensland, initially the brainchild of Cairns wildlife vet Dr Annabelle Olsson, is being established to meet an urgent need for practically oriented non-government wildlife conservation.

Founding participants of the new WCTQ are FNQ Wildlife Rescue, Mareeba Wetland Foundation, Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group, Cairns Frog Hospital, and Tolga Bat Hospital, with several other bodies in the region also keen to develop a regional nature conservation alliance.

The Conservancy has hit the ground running with discussions with local government bodies on future management of reserves and other land parcels of significant existing or potential biodiversity value.

The key focus areas of the conservancy are conservation land management, rescue and rehabilitation of native wildlife, conservation advice and training, education and interpretation, research, monitoring and management of wildlife health. For further details visit the website www.wildlifequeensland.com.au or email info@wildlifequeensland.com.au



Dr Annabelle Olsson with one of her patients.



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COMPANY NAME
STREET ADDRESS
CITY, STATE