protected

Magazine of National Parks Association of Queensland

Feeling the heat:
National Parks Associations across Australia

PLUS

Commercial walks in national parks

ALSO FEATURED

Cooloola Great Walk

Eungella honeyeater

NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF QUEENSLAND INC.

connect and protect

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Contents

Editor

Marika Strand.

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Contributors, please include contact details and brief personal summary. Articles can be submitted via email or hard copy. Digital photos should be minimum 300dpi.

Cover image

Image from the Cooloola Great Walk

Photo: Pru Hansen

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The National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ) promotes the preservation, expansion, good management and presentation of National Parks, and supports nature conservation in Queensland.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Graeme Bartrim
President, National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ)

Firstly, best wishes to you all as we settle into a not so new year.

We are pleased to hear positive murmurings from Government and Departmental officers regarding a substantial increase in funding for both protected area management and acquisition. This year's State budget allocations and release of the eagerly awaited Protected Area Strategy will determine how much our optimism is justified.

One of our responses to last year's expressions of interest (Eols) for development in Queensland national parks was to initiate a petition seeking the Eols to be withdrawn (on the grounds of a lack of consultation, apparent piecemeal planning without a Protected Area Strategy in place, and questioning of Government financial support for commercial ventures in parks). Some 3382 citizens have signed the petition but we have been unsuccessful in having the Eols withdrawn.

We await the next phase in this process and seek transparency to ensure public input.

Our approach to advocacy received strong support from our membership in a recent survey. The following 10 points were strongly agreed or agreed with from 95.1% our membership, confirming our direction regarding our continued advocacy:

1.Private (permanent) accommodation located adjacent to or near national parks, rather than within.

2.Thorough, transparent impact assessment undertaken with maintenance of long term nature conservation values prioritised.

3. Infrastructure owned by government. A private operator provides a bond for risk and rehabilitation and a regular financial contribution for park management.

4.Tracks and other infrastructure have minimal impact and are thoughtfully designed to reflect ecological values, including slope, soil, vegetation type and habitat.

5. Continual Ranger or guide presence.

6. Mandatory orientation and authentic interpretation with reinforcement throughout walk focused on conservation, Indigenous values, minimal impact.

7. User number cap based on ecological resilience.

8. One-way route with controlled and staggered start.

9. All waste removed.

10. Monitoring of selected indicators to determine impact with subsequent corrective action.

The threats to our national parks are well documented and without going into detail we can list a few here: climate change/intensification of fires, feral animals and weeds, changes to adjacent land use, and inappropriate use/over visitation. The article in this edition regarding other states and their protected areas puts this into context.

My daughter, Julia, recently visited Iran and, apart from enjoying the friendliness of the people and the superb architecture, learned a little about the country's natural history. In the mountains above Tehran she observed a statue of an Ibex. When asked about the possibility of seeing an actual ibex her guide indicated that the species had long gone. The Iran encyclopaedia suggests that only 5% of the numbers that occurred prior to 1979 remain.

Similarly, in a park in Alstonville, NSW there are metal trees (picture below). I am not sure what the motivation of the artist was, however, Alstonville is near the centre of the original Big Scrub which has been cleared with only tiny remnants remaining.

We are well aware of the extinctions that have occurred to date, with many more predicted.

But unlike other times and places we have a choice as to whether we allow our biodiversity to decline, one decision at a time. We have enough scientific evidence to both understand the issue and also to reverse it.

Or is there going to be a good business opportunity in creating statues and models of Queensland's biodiversity after it is lost?

FEELING THE HEAT:

National Parks Associations across Australia

Julia Bartrim
Member, National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ)

How are national park systems in other states faring? What challenges do they face?

The National Parks Association of Queensland caught up with the NPAs across Australia for their perspectives on the biggest issues facing their state's national parks.

While **bushfire management** was understandably very much on the minds of many, other common concerns raised included:

- **Funding shortfalls**; this issue, not surprisingly, was raised by every NPA.
- Pressure to accommodate **increasing visitor numbers**. Associations reported activities like mountain biking, ecotourism, and glamping were all becoming more popular ways to experience national parks.
- The need for the creation of **more national parks** in each state, to protect biodiversity and to meet global targets set by the United Nations in its Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020.
- **Insufficient protections** to ensure national park status is not revoked and is inviolable.
- **Difficulties obtaining accurate and meaningful data** on the dollars allocated to national parks budgets and on how these dollars were being spent.

New South Wales

About 9 per cent of NSW is national park, according to Anne Dickson, president of the National Parks Association of NSW.

Ms Dickson said NSW's national parks faced numerous "alarming" threats including: recent calls to de-gazette one national park, out-of-control feral pests and weeds, and "ever increasing visitor numbers".

Ms Dickson called the controversial Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act, which came into effect in June 2018 "the greatest insult of all".

Environmentalists say the new law protects feral horses at the expense of native species in Kosciuszko National Park.

Spokespersons for national park associations in Victoria and the ACT were also concerned about the impact the 'Wild Horse Act' would have on the national parks in their jurisdictions given the connectivity of alpine land between the three authorities.

CEO of the National Parks Association of NSW, Alix Goodwin, called the wild horse act an "international embarrassment" but it remains to be seen what the long-term impacts will be.

Australian Capital Territory

About 46 per cent of the ACT is national park.

The ACT possesses one national park – Namadgi, measuring over 106,000 hectares.

The management of fire in the park was one of the most significant issues for the park's future, according to convener of the National Parks Association of ACT environment subcommittee and former president, Rod Griffiths.

In 2003, when lightning strikes started bushfires in Namadgi, the fires ultimately decimated hundreds of Canberra properties and burnt much of the vegetation in the national park.

Although the habitat "recovered remarkably," according to ACT Government senior ecologist Dr Murray Evans in 2013, since then, bushfire management has remained a very high priority.

Mr Griffiths said Namadgi was also under pressure to "contribute financially to the ACT".

However, he said, the more proximate Canberra Nature Park soaked up many of the visitors who might otherwise go to the national park.

Mr Griffiths identified the use of drones and the increasing popularity of mountain bikes as emerging concerns.

Above: *Brumbies.* Photo: C. Mendoza via Unsplash. ***Banner:*** *Bushfire.* Photo: M. Held via Unsplash.

Victoria

About 15 per cent of Victoria is national park.

However, less than 0.5 per cent of the state's total expenditure goes towards national parks management, according to Matt Ruchel, executive director of the Victorian National Parks Association.

This is despite polling conducted by VNPA in November last year which found close to 70 per cent of voters support more funding for threatened species and a similar number supported increased funding for national parks.

Mr Ruchel said as well as funding shortages, about one million feral deer have become a big problem in the state's parks in recent years.

They've even popped up in Melbourne suburbs.

"People have been hitting them with cars," Mr Ruchel said, adding the deer population had got to this level partly because of the demands of hunting lobby groups.

Peri-urban parks were coming under increasing pressure as well, as visitor numbers increased on the back of a "booming" Victorian population.

"Everybody wants a piece of national parks," Mr Ruchel said.

"We're concerned about plans for glamping and infrastructure in parks."

Tasmania

Over 40 per cent of Tasmania is national park with about half of this percentage classified as World Heritage Area.

Tasmania's premier, Will Hodgman, made a special request in January to the Federal Government to cover the cost of controlling massive fires burning in the state's world heritage areas.

Fire and climate change were the chief concerns for Tasmania's national parks according to the president of the Tasmanian National Parks Association, Nicholas Sawyer.

"In the world heritage areas (fires) are becoming more frequent, more intense and larger," he said.

"The only question is how long it takes before we lose much of what makes Tasmania special."

Mr Sawyer said that many Tasmanian flora species were adapted to fire but "it doesn't mean they can survive more frequent fires, like a couple every decade".

He called for urgent funding into research for how to best manage fires in the state's national parks.

Mr Sawyer said the issue of climate change and associated increase in bushfires was "the big looming question that makes everything else look trivial".

South Australia

About 4.1 per cent of South Australia is national park, plus a further 1.9 per cent of the state is 'wilderness area' which, in South Australia, have higher levels of protection than national parks.

According to spokesperson for the Nature Conservation Society of South Australia, Julia Peacock, many South Australia national parks are 'jointly proclaimed' "meaning exploration and mining may also be permitted".

Ms Peacock said funding statistics for parks and other protected areas was "difficult to capture and analyse… (but) has been steadily declining over the past decade".

"Of the 17 IBRA bioregions occurring in South Australia only 9 are adequately represented in the protected areas system," she said.

Western Australia

When the state government announced its colossal 'Plan for our Parks' initiative last month, WA's peak environmental organisation responded with enthusiasm.

"We strongly welcome the historic plan to create five million hectares of new protected areas, which will leave a permanent legacy for our environment and future generations, while also contributing to regional economies," Conservation Council of WA director Piers Verstegen said in February.

The plan is in its infancy with The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) giving a projected time frame for the completion of all reservation proposals as 2024.

The DBCA declined to comment on the area of terrestrial vs marine protected areas that will make up the plan citing the urgent need to focus on responding to bushfires.

The Conservation Council of WA also declined to comment on the status of the national park system in WA. Note that WA has no national parks association.

National park systems across the country continue to face significant and potentially greater challenges than ever before. All NPAs are hoping governments will invest more money into park management. All NPAs, except Tasmania, want to see the decline in the rate of creation of new national parks come to an end. Western Australia, at least on paper, looks to be the state making the most progress in this area.

NB – The state of parks in the Northern Territory, which has no national parks association, was not covered in this article due to difficulties gaining responses from the relevant organisations.

THE IMPACTS OF COMMERCI PARKS – TWO CASE STUDIES

Susanne Cooper
Councillor, National Parks Association of Queensland

Multi-day walks in national parks are becoming increasingly sought after – especially commercial 'supported' walks run by private operators. Walkers only carry a day or light pack, as accommodation and food are typically provided, as well as guides. Such walks make the experience accessible to a wider range of people keen to appreciate the immersion in nature. However, the impacts of commercial walks in national parks are also coming under increased scrutiny.

Two such walks undertaken by the author in the last three years are presented as examples to illustrate diverse models of such walks, with noticeable differences in the impacts and experience.

1. Three Capes Walk, Tasmania

The commercially operated Three Capes walk along Tasmania's remote and wildly scenic southeast coast has only been available since late 2018, offering the 4 day walk for groups capped at 14 people. Accommodation is in state-of-the-art, well designed cabins, with two-bedroom rooms offering clean sheets and comfortable bedding. Cabins are not visible from the main track, and public walkers would not be aware of their presence, as they are nestled in the vegetation, with minimal clearing and a low footprint. Their location is positioned to take advantage of magnificent coastal views. Grey water is filtered and discharged. All toilet waste is collected in sealed containers. The accommodation is serviced by helicopters for all maintenance, including food. The noise and disturbance from helicopter trips would negatively impact on the hiking experience for all.

Although the cabin design is low impact, the standard borders on 'luxury', with a plunge pool, massage service, clean sheets, duvets and towels. Food and alcohol were also of a very high standard. Although such comforts are welcomed by many, they are not necessary to appreciate the natural values and landscape. This also has the impact of placing the walk into a higher price bracket which would make it unaffordable for some, and attracting those who view 'luxury' facilities as an important motivator for the walk, rather than the experience of being immersed in nature.

2. Larapinta Trail, Northern Territory

Located west from Alice Springs, the iconic 223km Larapinta Trail traverses some of Australia's most spectacular inland topography. Although the whole trail takes around 16 days to walk, commercial operators offer shorter versions of the most spectacular sections. A 6-day walk was based in a campsite located in the sandy bed of a tributary of the Finke River. Located just outside the national park boundary, the base campsite was temporary with no permanent structures, and is removed before the wet season sets in and the rivers run high. A small bus was used to transport walkers to the start and finish of each days walk.

An impressive feature was the effort taken to ensure a low impact of the site. All waste was sorted into four types (compost, cardboard & plastic, screwable and other) for recycling. Toilet arrangements were interesting. The motto was 'every tree is a lavatoree', and people were



Above: *Images from the Three Capes Walk (L to R): the wild, majestic scenery; state of the art huts nestled into the landscape; removable containers collect sewage waste.* Photos: Susanne Cooper.

AL WALKS IN NATIONAL

encouraged to urinate in the bush surrounding the camp into the sandy river soils, which are flooded in the summer wet season. Toilets were lined with plastic bags and all toilet waste was bagged to be removed from site and composted.

Water is scarce and was supplied by two 3000L tanks. Its use was tightly managed; a small tin was supplied to wash hands after toileting, and showering was a splash down from a small bowl. The conservative approach meant water use was only four litres per person per day for washing and drinking.

Beds were swags in a tent, although many opted to put their swags in the river bed to experience the amazing night sky. All power for the fridge, freezer and lights was generated through portable solar cells. There was no dining room, but seats around an open fire, with wood brought in. No vegetation was cleared around the camp area, as tents were located among the scattered eucalypts.

The small walking group was capped at 8 people.

The experience was low impact, but very comfortable and enjoyable. An explanation of Indigenous values and connections to country was given by a local Aboriginal woman at the start of the walk, which provided a valuable context.

Both walks used guides, who also prepared meals. The common model for most commercial operators is that guides typically work across a number of walks, often in different parts of Australia. It's usual for guides working in Tasmania in the spring-summer months to then move to hotter climates in the winter months (eg central Australia), reflecting the seasonal variations in both weather and demand. This means the guides' depth of knowledge about the area's geology, Indigenous history, flora and fauna can be somewhat limited.

The tendency for guides to place themselves at the front and back of the group also means you walk as 'a pack'. Those who enjoy the solitude of walking on their own can be frustrated by this arrangement.

However, on both walks, a strong low impact culture was set by the guides, with a clear explanation and continued reinforcement of appropriate behavior whilst on the walk.

In summary, it is clear that commercial walks can be designed and managed for low impact, particularly around the behaviour of walkers, and the location, design and servicing of accommodation. They do play a role in making such walks accessible to more people.

Many co-walkers on multiple-day walks are over 50, with a long history of active backpacking in their younger days. A common feature of this group was the strong appreciation and knowledge of the bush and national parks, and supported walks have a role in enabling this cohort to continue enjoying such experiences.

However, an emerging issue is for commercial walks to increasingly pitch more toward the luxury end of the ecotourism market. This means a higher level of servicing (extra traffic), plus making it unaffordable for some. An equity issue arises about having such facilities on publicly funded national parks which, in principle, are accessible to all.

It also, of course, may compromise the cardinal principle of national park management.

Above: *Images from the Larapinta Trail (L to R): some of our group enjoying the magnificent topography of the West McDonnell Ranges; the base camp - the 'dining room' in the centre consists of chairs gathered round an open fire; the main 'room' - comfortable but with a low footprint.* Photos: Susanne Cooper.

PARK IN FOCUS

Cooloola Great Walk, Great Sandy National Park

Pru Hansen
Outdoor Adventure Australia, www.outdooradventureaustralia.com

A veritable playground for adventure lovers, the Cooloola Recreation Area of Great Sandy National Park truly offers it all, from surfing Double Island Point, to camping, fishing, and my favourite pastime, hiking. The combination of offerings and proximity to major centres make Cooloola one of the most popular destinations in South East Queensland.

Cooloola derived its name from the Aboriginal name for cypress trees 'Kululu'. Cypress trees once flourished through Cooloola Recreation Area. However, when early settlers moved in the cypress were logged and now very few remain.

Nature, however, has an incredible way of overcoming such events and the Cooloola Recreation Area we see now is enchanting with an ever-changing landscape through rainforest, tall eucalypt forest, dry coastal woodland, heath plains and even across some sandy plains.

To fully understand how truly amazing this region is, the best way to experience it is on the **Cooloola Great Walk**. This 5-day hike through the Cooloola region of the stunning Great Sandy National Park will challenge you and amaze with stunning views.

The near 100km hike starts out from the incredible Carlos Sandblow at Rainbow Beach where it's goodbye to civilisation for a few days.

Day 1

Starting at the northern end of Cooloola Great Walk in Rainbow Beach, within minutes you reach the magnificent Carlos Sandblow which is a part of Cooloola sand mass where weather conditions have transformed a forest into a 'moonscape' of sand covering 15 hectares. This incredible sandy visage combines with spectacular views over Rainbow Beach, Double Island Point, and Tin Can Bay.

This 15.2km section of the hike gives a very good taste of the conditions for the next 4 days. A drop down in elevation during the last quarter of the day takes you to Poona Lake, 12 hectares of fresh water set amongst the bushland. When the air is still, the reflections off the water are stunning. It is a photographer's dream with the contrast of the tannin-stained water against the white sand, and a great spot for a break.

Poona can also be accessed as a 2km hike from Bymien Picnic Area if you are not up to the full Great Walk.

After Poona Lake you drop down gradually about 90 meters of elevation. Then it's well UP at an angle that feels similar in inclination to the trajectory of a NASA launch. Take it slow and steady and let the magical sounds of the lush rainforest envelop you.

That evening sleep at Kauri Walkers Camp – named for the kauri pines growing in the region. It is hidden away in an area that feels a million miles from anywhere, deep in the rainforest.

This campground is generally the busiest of all four campgrounds due to its proximity to Rainbow and Teewah Beaches, providing a great opportunity to catch up with fellow hikers and shoot the breeze over dinner before retiring for the night.

Day 2

One of the more challenging days both physically and mentally, being 20.5km, it is the longest of the days. You will travel mostly through rainforest full of strangler figs, massive Kauri pines and plentiful wildlife before coming across Lake Cooloomera just

Above: *Poona Lake.* ***Banner:*** *Cooloola sand mass.* Photos: Pru Hansen.

north of Litoria Walkers Camp.

Lake Cooloomera, whilst pretty, is not a place to swim, with snakes plentiful in the reeds as well as being home to many 'acid frog' species and birds.

About 600m uphill past the lake lies Litoria Walkers camp. Litoria – meaning 'shore' or 'beach' – is the name given to Australia's largest genera of frogs. The high-pitched sounds of the Cooloola sedgefrog (*Litoria cooloolensis*) who have adapted to the acidity in the nearby lake may be heard.

Day 3

A day full of rapidly changing landscapes, from rainforest beside the beach to swamp as you near the Noosa River. Experiencing these changes over such a short distance helps you really appreciate how nature responds to slight environmental changes.

Keep an eye out for Ramsey's hut along the way, an old timber cutters hut which was abandoned prior to the region being classified national park in 1975… look but do not touch.

Dutgee (the Aboriginal word for boronia shrubs which grow through Cooloola) Walkers Camp is on the Noosa River, making a fantastic way to mark the middle of Cooloola Great Walk with a swim, if you are game.

Day 4

What an incredible day despite it being the second longest day. A nice and easy start to the day with a flat walk along the banks of the Noosa River is a stark change in landscape to the previous days' landscape. The contorted shapes of the trees native to the low-lying flats of the Noosa River are beautiful in a macabre kind of way. It is a spectacle to behold for sure.

Up into the hills again with a climb of about 190 meters and then BAM, the Cooloola Sand Patch…wow! This mini desert, complete with its own oasis has to be seen to truly appreciate it. It is a 1km hike to get across it… thankfully mostly downhill when heading north to south.

After crossing this desert, it's back into the bush and a long walk through valleys between massive sand dunes with constant presentation of viewpoints in differing directions and incredible breezes to the final camp of the trip, Brahminy walkers camp.

It is a great spot with a picturesque view of the sunset over Lake Cootharaba to the west, the sunrise over the Pacific Ocean to the east, and infamous Noosa in the south from the common area. Definitely a favourite camp spot and an incredible place to spend the final night.

Day 5 - The last day

17.3km to go and it's almost all downhill to the pub from here!

Despite the elevation not being anywhere near as high as it is on any of the previous days, the views and sounds of cars driving along the beach gently re-introduce the modern world. You will initially travel through lush rainforest before hitting the sand for a short section and back in through the coastal heath plains of Arthur Harrold Nature Reserve.

Giddy with achievement, head to the pub, pull up at a table out the back so as not to scare other patrons and settle in for the best feed you have had in days and a well-earned beverage.

The author has endeavoured to ensure that the information presented here is as accurate as possible. However, they or NPAQ do not accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person guided by this article.

Above: *Cliff view during the Cooloola Great Walk.* Photo: Pru Hansen.

EUNGELLA BIRD WEEK

Eungella National Park

John Brinnand

Imagine an isolated strip of tropical rainforest about sixty by three kilometres, surrounded by cleared pastures and swathes of dry eucalypt forest. Give it a bit of altitude, let's say an average of 800 metres, and almost all of its annual rainfall in summer. Now bless it with almost 900 species of plants and a spectacular array of wildlife, including 227 recorded bird species (one of which is endemic), and presto - Eungella National Park!

Approximately 90 kilometres west of Mackay in Central Queensland, Eungella National Park and the associated Clarke Connors Range is home to the endemic Eungella honeyeater (*Bolemoreus hindwoodi*). It isn't an especially attractive bird, but its singularity attracts many. So, in September last year, thirty keen birdwatchers from around the country congregated for the second annual Eungella Bird Week (EBW).

EBW is a labour of love by WildMob and Birdlife Mackay, two organisations with a deep respect for wildlife, the environment, and the community. At the welcome dinner in the Eungella Hall, catered by the local resident's group, we were assigned a head guide from WildMob and experienced volunteers from Birdlife.

Two things were clear from the start: firstly, despite its bird-focussed title, EBW would introduce us to many more aspects of the natural and cultural environment; and secondly, while the organisers were relaxed and negotiable about the program, lateness would not be accommodated.

Walking back to our digs through a refreshing blanket of drizzle-mist, I commented that EBW looked more promising in the flesh than it had on paper and we had been pretty much guaranteed a sighting of the Eungella honeyeater.

By the afternoon of the following day the Eungella honeyeater was in the bag, so to speak. The Mackay birders, a jolly lot who, fortunately, take birding more seriously than they take themselves, led us to one of the many places where remnant rainforest borders farmland. Here, a good number of climbing pandans (*Freycinetia excelsa*) snaking up the trunks of fig trees and tulipwood, were flowering late in the season. The attractive orange and red bracts cup a stamen of impressive proportions that the Eungella honeyeater find irresistible.

Our hosts alerted us to the Eungella honeyeater's high-pitched bubbling call and moments later it was out and proud for all to see. At such moments I face a dilemma. Thrilling as a first sighting is, there is another sort of wonderment to be found on

Above: *A view from Eungella National Park.* Photo: Einalem via Wikimedia Commons. ***Banner:*** *Ferns in Eungella National Park*. Photo: Kimberly Booth via Wikimedia Commons.

the faces of the observers. Greedily, I try to take in both. As lenses focus on the unassuming bird and shutters rapid-fire, I visualise the coffee table book that someone someday will create of portraits of folk enraptured with nature. I predict that many of the book's subjects will be bird watchers.

In one sense it was ideal to see the Eungella honeyeater early on as we could then relax and take in everything the national park has to offer: platypus, bettongs, frogs, butterflies and much more. By the end of the week we had seen a combined total of 125 bird species, and, encouragingly, the Eungella honeyeater in three different locations.

Surveys of the Eungella honeyeater date from 1939. More recently, infrequent counts by QPWS and regular surveys by Birdlife Mackay (1994 to the present) differ in their estimates of the total population but agree on the trend: since 2000 the population has declined by about one third. Drought and land clearing are the identified culprits; in particular, the continued loss of a winter food source from flowering eucalypts, especially the lemon scented gum (*Corymbia citriodora*).

It's certainly exciting to see any rare creature, and people travel the world for just such an experience, but it can also be very disturbing. The WWF report, Living Planet, reveals that from 1970 to 2012 the Earth's population of non-human vertebrates decreased by 58 percent. In the same period human vertebrates doubled.

If CO^2 emissions maintain their current trajectory, the Bureau of Meteorology forecasts more severe and prolonged droughts and significantly increased summer temperatures across Australia. Efforts to preserve tracts of rainforest and to forestall the logging of eucalypt forest are laudable, but without a substantive and immediate reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and serious money committed to preserving biodiversity, it's difficult to imagine the Eungella honeyeater surviving in the wild.

Above: *Eungella honeyeater.* Photo: John Brinnand.

While some species may succumb to extinction without notice I am sure this would not be the case for the Eungella honeyeater. During EBW we were introduced to many residents committed to conservation, including some who campaigned to establish Eungella National Park, others who look after it, and property owners who maintain their land for wildlife. We also learned from citizen scientists passionate about rainforest flora, orchids, owls, platypus and much more.

I tip my lid to all these wonderful people and to WildMob, Bildlife Mackay and QPWS. However, it was the bird art competition by students of Eungella State School that really inspired me. These children, eager to appreciate and preserve their local habitat face global environmental challenges on a scale that humanity has never seen. As they presented their artworks to the assembly of aged adults, I recalled the words of the anthropologist Margaret Mead: *never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that has.*

Eungella Bird Week was a superb experience and Eungella National Park a treasure. My only regret is that we stayed in accommodation rather than the excellent campgrounds, but there'll always be next time.

WILDLIFE FEATURE

Eungella honeyeater *(Bolemoreus hindwoodi)*

Daryl Barnes and Graham Armstrong
Birdlife Mackay

Inland from the coastal town of Mackay in central Queensland and bordering the Pioneer Valley, is the Clarke Range. Recognised as a Key Biodiversity Area by Birdlife Australia, it is home to the endemic Eungella honeyeater (*Bolemoreus hindwoodi*). This honeyeater has the smallest distribution of any mainland Australian bird and is listed as Vulnerable under Queensland's *Nature Conservation Act*.

In Eungella National Park, from 500 metres above sea level to the summit of Mt Dalrymple (1,227 metres), is a narrow stretch of plateau rainforest. This plateau is critical habitat for the Eungella honeyeater.

Since the recognition of the Eungella honeyeater, in 1983, as a separate species from the more northern bridled honeyeater, efforts have been made to learn more about its habits, movements and population size. However, much remains to be learned.

The most significant obstacles to this endeavour are the rugged inaccessibility of much of the Clarke Range and the bird's mobility. An opportunistic feeder, the Eungella honeyeater relies on resources like nectar, honeydew, manna and lerps, which progressively become available across its range throughout the year.

The endemic Eungella honeyeater. Photos: Daryl Barnes and Graham Armstrong.

To add to the frustration of locating the honeyeater, the birds are in almost constant motion, flying in and out of flowering trees or vines, stopping but briefly to feed and often hiding amongst dense vegetation. Only the patient observer and dedicated photographer will enjoy the pleasure of seeing a stationary bird.

In the dry winter months, the birds are known to forage to the south in Crediton State Forest and to the north in Cathu State Forest. Concerns about the effect on the honeyeater of continued small scale, selective logging of these forest areas led to surveys being conducted in the winter months of 2014-2016 by members of the Mackay branch of Birdlife Australia and a Mackay Conservation Group analyst.

The work was funded by the Mackay Regional Council and Mackay Conservation Group. From this work the Eungella honeyeater population was estimated to be upward of 5,000 individuals. The report also included a consideration of the potential effect of climate change on the timing, frequency and abundance of flowering events in the Clarke Range and how that could impact the Eungella honeyeater.

More recently, the Eungella honeyeater has had to contend with rampant bushfires in Crediton and Cathu State Forests. The result of an unprecedented dry spell in November last year, the fires burnt into the rainforest habitat of Eungella. About 10% of the national park was burnt.

Observations in the days following the November fires indicated most of the damaged habitat occurred in adjacent state forests with the 'true' rainforest areas only marginally affected around the fringes. Small numbers of Eungella honeyeaters were encountered at various locations, with random sightings reported throughout the national park and in the Eungella township, where native garden plants attract occasional birds.

However, the longer-term effect of the fires and other factors on the Eungella honeyeater will need to be determined through formal population surveys in coming months and years.

The national profile of the Eungella honeyeater is increasing and we are slowly learning more about the potential threats it faces. A concerted effort to understand the bird more completely is required to help ensure its future.

Another important step has been the recent inclusion of higher altitude Eungella honeyeater habitat in a Banding of Bushbirds project. Recently, three Eungella honeyeaters were caught and banded, an important first step in understanding the bird's movements. Local birders continue to visit the more accessible areas of Eungella National Park, including areas affected by fire, and reassuringly, the Eungella Honeyeater continues to be seen and heard in unburnt areas.

Through the Mackay and Whitsunday environmental groups, and members of the local community, interest in the Eungella honeyeater has increased over the years. The Mackay Branch of Birdlife Australia has provided labour, support and enthusiasm. We now have an improved knowledge of the bird and public awareness has also increased.

THE NATIONAL PARK EXPERIENCE

Personal reflection on why our parks must be valued

Jackie Rose'Meyer
Vice President, National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ)

Since moving to Queensland six years ago our family has made countless holidays and day trips to Queensland's national parks. There are so many choices.

Our most frequent and favourite day trip though has been to a reserve, not a national park. Located on the Sunshine Coast, Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve is a short one hour and 10-minute drive from Brisbane. A few times a year the five of us will set off to Mary Cairncross followed by lunch in Montville or Maleny.

The reserve comprises 55 hectares of subtropical rainforest overlooking the Glass House Mountains. It has a huge range of plants and animals that make their home in this reserve. The kids always take great delight in spotting the red legged pademelon, 'butterflies' (the pink underwing moth) and on occasion we have seen snakes, including the red bellied black snake.

The bird population is diverse. We find that we see and hear more bird life when we visit the reserve early in the day. We are often lucky to see the eastern yellow robin on the ground, and it always makes the kids smile when they hear the loud whip of the eastern whipbird.

The rainforest tracks are perfect walks for introducing children to bushwalking. There are 2 km of walking tracks which are very manageable, with a large proportion of this being wheelchair and stroller accessible. The track is shaded by the tree canopy and the walks are still very enjoyable in the rain. Two of our three children have been fascinated by the leaches brought out in the rain, not so much the third who was the source of their food.

At the edge of the forest is an Education Centre, the Rainforest Discovery Centre, and a public recreation area with BBQ's and a playground. The Rainforest Discovery Centre is very interactive and keeps the family entertained whenever we return. It includes habitat rooms, microscopes and all kinds of information.

The area is not protected as a national park, it is a reserve. The land was donated to the Sunshine Coast Council in 1941 with the aim of preserving the rainforest. The reserve is managed by the Sunshine Coast Council with the support of a number of very helpful and informative local volunteers.

One of the many things I like about visiting Mary Cairncross Reserve is the gold coin donation system to support conservation work at the reserve. I have often wondered how our national parks could introduce something similar to help contribute to the protection of, and education about, our national parks.

As a family the time we spend together in nature are some of the best quality times we have – no urgency or distractions; so much to see and share together; and beauty and peacefulness you just don't get anywhere else.

The authour's family enjoying Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve. Photos: Jackie Rose'Meyer.

RANGER OF THE MONTH

Insights into the diverse backgrounds and day-to-day activities of Queensland's park rangers

Shellie Cash
Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS)

Shellie Cash is Ranger-in-Charge at Currawinya National Park in western Queensland. She has always loved being outdoors studying different animals. Growing up on a farm gave her a passion for land management and, after completing high school, Shellie took on a traineeship with QPWS in Rockhampton. It didn't take her long to realise that she had found her perfect job.

How long have you worked in national parks?

I've been with QPWS for 11 years now. I have met some interesting folks and made some great friends along the way. I love being able to share my knowledge and utilise the many different skills that I've picked up from colleagues over the years.

Which parks have you worked in?

I've worked in many different parks in Queensland. On the east coast, I've worked at places such as Rockhampton, Byfield and Agnes Water. I've also spent time in our western parks such as Clermont, Girraween, Welford and Currawinya National Park (my current position). Even though the place where I grew up, and still call home, is Rockhampton, the western areas keep calling me back.

What is your most memorable moment?

My most memorable moment would have to be seeing my first marine turtle come up the beach to nest. We were working on the beach at Deepwater National Park, on Queensland's central coast, putting out baits for foxes, when a loggerhead turtle came up (in the middle of the day) to lay her eggs. I had never seen a turtle egg before, let alone a turtle laying her eggs. I think I must have watched her for an hour or more—after all, turtles are not the quickest animals on land!

Ranger Shellie Cash checking springs monitoring cameras at Currawinya National Park. Photos: Queensland Government.

Can you describe your favourite national parks experience?

My best experience would have to be seeing the wildflowers and hiking the walking tracks at Girraween National Park. The landscape there is like nothing I've ever seen—the biggest rocks you'll ever see and so many different kinds of pretty little flowers. I love it.

What is the best part about working in a National Park?

The best part would have to be that I get to work every day in a place where most people only get to visit for their holidays. As a Park Ranger, there are so many different things that you have the opportunity to do, and no day is ever the same as the next. I like that one day I will be digging holes or fixing an old building and the next I could be fighting a fire or trapping and identifying different rodents and reptiles.

What is your top tip for visitors to parks for bushwalking?

My top tip is to know how long the trail is going to take to walk. The best way to do that is to check details on the web site, and check with the local ranger once you're on site. There is nothing worse than having to walk back in the dark because it took longer than expected. Also take enough water and have comfortable shoes.

What is your top tip for campers?

Go online and find out what facilities and activities are near the camp site you propose to camp at. That way you won't be disappointed and won't have to book another site. Also, you should never go without bug spray and extra toilet paper!

NPAQ thanks Shellie for taking time to answer our questions. We appreciate the work all QPWS rangers undertake in protecting Queensland's national parks.

queenslandnationalparks.com.au qld.gov.au/camping facebook.com/qldnationalparks @QldParks; #QldParks

WHAT'S ON

For more information on activities & events, visit our website:
www.npaq.org.au/events

NPAQ activities

Glenlogan Lakes Bird Watching
Date: Sunday 24 March 2019
Meet: 7.30am, St Jude Cct, Jimboomba
Grade: Easy
Cost: $5
Leader: Geraldine Buchanan (3349 1109 or geraldine_buchanan@hotmail.com)

Coomera Circuit

Date: Sunday 7 April 2019
Meet: 8:10 am for an 8:30am start, Binna Burra carpark
Grade: Intermediate
Cost: $5
Leader: Frank Freeman (0427 655 514 or frank_fr@bigpond.net.au)

Kumbartcho Bird Watching
Date: Sunday 14 April 2019
Meet: 7.30am at Kumbartcho car park, 15 Bunya Pine Ct., Eatons Hill
Grade: Easy
Cost: $5
Leader: Jocelyn Dixon (3378 8486 or jocelyndixon@iprimus.com.au)

Priors Pocket Bird Watching
Date: Sunday 19 May 2019
Meet: 7.30am, Priors Pocket - Moggill
Grade: Easy
Cost: $5
Leader: Lesley Joyce (0423 109 788, 3818 7646 or blwrgl@gmail.com)

NPAQ 2019 Easter Camp at Girraween

Numerous activities will be arranged for all members and to suit all fitness levels. These range from long to short walks, flat to hilly tracks to off track walks. Self-drive tours of the district will be provided for any non-walkers. Bring all your camping requirements, including drinking water. Arrive from Thursday 18th and depart before 10am Tuesday 23rd.

The campsite, with easy access for Tents caravans and campers, is on flat private property. Camping facilities will be basic. Non-potable creek water may be available and can be used for showering etc. Pit toilets will be provided, evening Happy Hours are planned and a night time camp fire provided. We will have a Saturday night dinner at a local Tavern.

Members who would like to attend but do not have camping gear can book accommodation in the district. Should you wish to book, do so quickly due to high demand on the Easter weekend. Cabins are available at Sommerville Valley Tourist Park at Storm King Dam.

Date: Thursday 18 April - Tuesday 23 April 2019
Grade: Various from easy to hard
Meet: Girraween - exact location details will be supplied upon nomination.
Cost: $50, children $25, free under 10
Leader: Ian Peacock (ianpeacock@hotmail.com)

NPAQ events

NPAQ May Member's Meeting
Date: Wednesday 15 May 2019
Time: 7.15pm for 7.30pm start
Venue: NPAQ Offices: 10/36 Finchley Street, Milton

NPAQ November Member's Meeting
Date: Wednesday 20 November 2019
Time: 7.15pm for 7.30pm start
Venue: NPAQ Offices: 10/36 Finchley Street, Milton

Vale

NPAQ is saddened by the passing of John Sinclair, founder of affiliate group FIDO (Fraser Island Defenders Organisation). A renowned Queensland conservationist, John led campaigns to protect Fraser Island from sand-mining and logging, and have it declared a World Heritage Area.

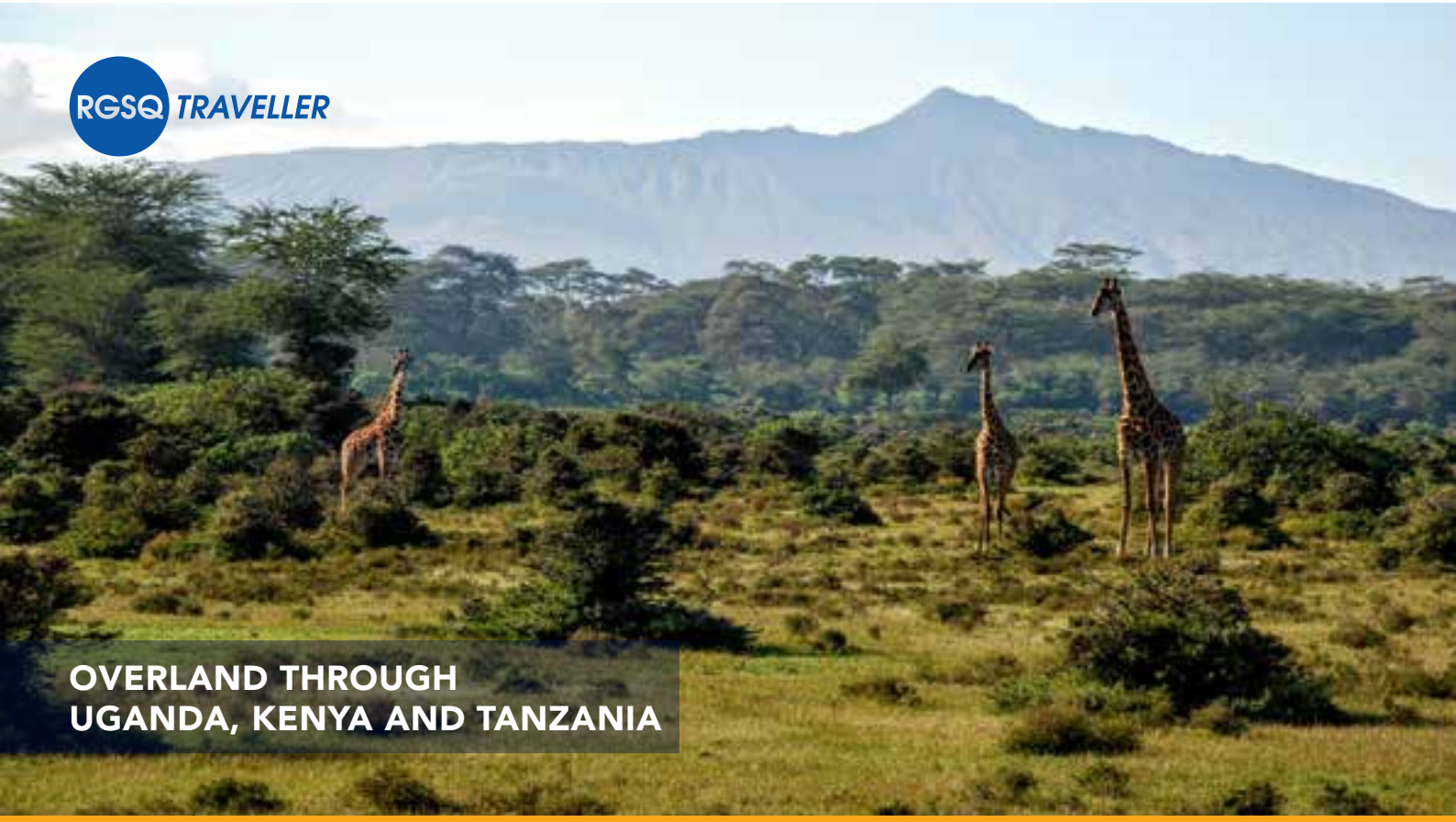
NPAQ was also recently made aware of the passing of member Lorraine Best. Lorraine was a regular volunteer with the vegetation management group at Jolly's Lookout.

NPAQ has also learned of the passing of member Mike Wilke. Mike had previously served as an NPAQ Councillor.

We send our sincere condolences to their friends and families.

NPAQ Outback Parks Tour 2016. Photo: Wendy Bell.

RGSQ TRAVELLER



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FOR A COPY of the extended itinerary please contact RGSQ Traveller on **07 3368 2066** or email **info@rgsq.org.au** or visit **www.rgsq.org.au**.

ONLY A FEW SPOTS LEFT, now that we are getting closer to the departure date.
Date of Publication - 11/03/2019

RGSQ TRAVELLER are offering GEOGRAPHY, GAME PARKS & GORILLAS as part of our ongoing programme of geography on the ground in Africa - overland through three countries - Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, to take place starting 22 June 2019.

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HIGHLIGHTS

UGANDA

Murchison Falls, Queen Elizabeth National Park, Kampala, Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park where we hope to meet the mountain gorilla families;

TANZANIA

Lake Victoria, Serengeti National Park and Ngorongoro Conservation Area;

KENYA

Masai Mara National Reserve, Amboseli National Park with unmatched views of Mount Kilimanjaro, Nakuru, Tsavo East National Park, Tsavo West, Sheldrik's Elephant Orphanage and release centre Voi, and The Giraffe Centre Nairobi.