

protected

Magazine of National Parks Association of Queensland

Qld Chief Scientist's Love of National Parks

PLUS

Ecotourism Education for Kids
Worth Protecting? Field Surveys Can Help

ALSO FEATURED

Wiliyan-ngurru National Park
Saving Bimblebox
Southern Pink Underwing Moth
Ranger spotlight



Issue 31
Autumn 2021



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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

& Banner: Great Nowranrie Cave, Wiliyan-ngurru National Park. Photos: Marco Bracchi - Isaeagle Photography

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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



Susanne Cooper
President, National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ)



Welcome to the Autumn edition of Protected. Ecotourism in Queensland and across Australia is currently a key issue concerning the management of national parks and appreciation of nature. The interest is global, and proposals from commercial operators will only increase.

NPAQ has been an active advocate for all ecotourism to be based around objectives that conserve natural and cultural values.

We often think of the ecotourism issue as one that is relatively recent, aided by easier travel, access, and the growth in organised trips or walks.

It's often instructive to look back and see what we were thinking a few decades ago, and assess how much has changed. The Australian Ranger Bulletin was a national journal for conservation managers, started in 1980. I was recently reading an old copy published 40 years ago in 1981, and came across an interesting article on Recreation written by CSIRO scientist Dr Graham Yapp. It gives cause for reflection. Here are some key points from the article:

- The major threat to many conservation areas is the overuse of recreation
- Recreation demand is far more insidious and harder to combat than are other threats, for example from mining companies
- In most people's minds, national parks are recreation resources and a playground

- The trend is for most funds to go into managing recreation, with little left for research and conservation.

We have seen such issues and trends continue over the past 40 years, even though alerts were being raised back then.

But times do also change. Dr Yapp mentioned the "high intensity use that is now a permanent feature of Ayers Rock" to access views of the spectacular scenery. Interesting that as well as the renaming to Uluru, the 'permanent' opportunity to climb on the rock is now prohibited. This change would have been difficult to foresee in 1981.

The article also includes an interesting suggestion: we should support the dedication of high quality reserves specifically for recreation activity as state recreation areas, to take the pressure off national parks. They should also employ permanent, professional recreation managers.

It's interesting and informative to sometimes look back and reflect on how much has changed...or not. Much of the funding allocated to national parks by various state governments is earmarked to provide

recreation infrastructure: walkways, lookouts, campgrounds, amenities, roads and visitor interpretive centres. Its increasingly challenging to get dedicated funds to actively manage the conservation of nature, the primary purpose of these areas.

I hope you continue to enjoy and appreciate our unique flora and fauna in the diversity of 312 national parks across Queensland.



QUEENSLAND CHIEF'S LOVE OF NATIONAL PARKS

Professor Hugh Possingham
Office of the Queensland Chief Scientist

In September 2020 Professor Hugh Possingham took over as Queensland's Chief Scientist. Professor Possingham has a Bachelor's degree with Honours in Applied Mathematics from the University of Adelaide and a doctorate in Ecological Modelling as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University. He has worked for numerous universities as a professor, department head, and led several research centres. Most notably he co-developed the Marxan software for conservation planning, which has been described as "the most significant contribution to conservation biology to emerge from Australia's research community". His most recent role was as the Chief Scientist at The Nature Conservancy, which has protected more than 40 million hectares of land and thousands of kilometres of rivers worldwide.

Professor Possingham was kind enough to give NPAQ an insight into what national parks mean to him. Here's what he had to say.

National Parks Inspired My Love of Nature and Science

My father was an avid birdwatcher. We would spend hours in national parks in South Australia learning to identify different species by sight and sound. His affliction rubbed off on me and we began to take note of where and how each species foraged, and had long discussions hypothesising why different species utilised different habitats. From those long walks with my dad, a passion for understanding our natural world was born, and a desire to protect it grew.

When I was 18 I was fortunate to win a small grant (\$1,500) from the Reserves Advisory Committee in South Australia. My task was to create bird lists and vegetation maps for a suite of small conservation parks in the south-east of South Australia. While the money barely paid my petrol costs, I was delighted to spend my holidays over the next three years walking through the bush counting

and mapping little known places such as Fairview Conservation Park, Glen Roy Conservation Park and Gum Lagoon Conservation Park. These lists and maps fed into a 1999 biodiversity plan for the south east of South Australia that I co-authored with state government scientists.

The south-east of South Australia is very different from Queensland. Only 13% of the native vegetation remains with the majority of that in parks and heritage areas, and approximately ten of the 200 terrestrial bird species are locally extinct or almost extinct.

When I moved to Queensland in 2000, I was struck by the amount of remnant vegetation; over 30% in South-East Queensland and over 75% for the whole state, and the abundance of species that had all but disappeared from my favourite parts of South Australia, including the Grey-crowned Babbler, Azure Kingfisher, Black-chinned Honeyeater and Spotted Quail-thrush.

Coming from an area that had already lost too much of its biodiversity, to an area with such diversity, helped me to appreciate the work undertaken to preserve them even more. Hence, I actively engaged in discussion on land clearing control leading to "The Brigalow Declaration" <https://martinemaroon.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/2003-brigalow-declaration.pdf>.

I would hate to see Queensland suffer the same extinctions as have occurred in other areas of Australia, and in my work I have spread the message that we can all contribute to their protection.

The National Parks Association of Queensland has been an



Above: Hugh at the Beach. Photo: Friends of Sherwood Arboretum Association.
Banner: Hugh Birdwatching.

ECOTOURISM FOR KIDS: ENHANCING CHILDREN'S REL

Heli King , José-Carlos García-Rosell & Steve Noakes

Environmental education is a fundamental aspect of ecotourism. It characterises ecotourism and differentiates it from other forms of nature-based tourism. Ecotourism education can increase visitors' knowledge of and conservation attitudes towards the protected area, as well as promote pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour in general. Genuine, well-designed ecotourism can be a tool for supporting biodiversity conservation and allowing strategic tourism development whilst protecting natural and cultural heritage values in protected areas such as national parks.

Although ecotourism is considered a good way to develop environmental values among tourists, few studies have focused on the educational impact of ecotourism on young children.

A study was conducted to explore how play in ecotourism sites supports children to learn, not just about, but also with nature. It focused on understanding the relationship between preschool aged children and nature in ecotourism in Queensland, using the theoretical concept of play-based learning as a pedagogical method.

The data was gathered through 10 semi-structured interviews with professionals in ecotourism and children's education with knowledge of and experience in planning and providing educational activities for young children.

The findings show that ecotourism sites can offer a favourable setting for early childhood environmental education and for enhancing the child-nature relationship. However, if children do not actively and regularly engage with the natural world, they do not form a sound relationship with it. The study emphasises three findings more specifically: learning about nature through play, the role of adults in learning, and learning through storytelling.

Learning about nature through play

Interaction and play in nature contribute to children developing an understanding and respect for the natural world and all the living things in it. According to research and the professionals interviewed in the study, there is a relationship between early childhood experiences in nature and the formation of pro-environmental values and attitudes.

In order for children to develop love and care for the natural world, they need to learn about nature and how life is connected to it. Ecotourism sites, e.g. in national parks, are excellent learning spaces for children to get familiar with nature and build a relationship with it. This idea stems from the environmental stewardship premise in which children are considered as potential guardians of nature. Animals, sticks, stones and other natural elements are "tools" to support play and learning in nature. Also, roleplay is an important play activity through which children can learn about nature and develop a positive relationship with it. Children can pretend to be a national park ranger or a wildlife hero in a mission to save the national park or a specific animal in it.

Adults influencing and shaping children-nature relationships

The presence of adults, especially that of parents and educators, is important in influencing the relationship between children and nature.

For learning through ecotourism (about nature) to be fruitful, it requires the commitment and support of adults at home. Adults have a significant part as role models in children's journey to develop a relationship with nature. Adults are seen as role models, but also as supporters, facilitators, guides, supervisors and providers of play opportunities in nature. They (mainly parents and educators) are gatekeepers for children's access to natural environments, and therefore play a key role in supporting learning about nature and forming a relationship with it.

However, research supports the idea of free play in nature arguing that it is important to let children play and explore without too much adult involvement, guidance or interference. Free and unplanned play in nature allows children to learn with nature as they explore natural materials and learn through discovering and interacting with the natural world (animals, insects, plants etc.).

The power of storytelling

The study suggests that



RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE

storytelling is a powerful means for enhancing children's relationship with the natural world. Storytelling stimulates children's imagination and supports their learning with nature. Therefore, it can be used as an interpretive tool for early childhood environmental education in ecotourism sites.

Preschool children love listening to stories and sharing them with others. They can use storytelling to make sense of their experience with nature, for example through reflection. They can also mentor each other with their own stories. Storytelling allows ecotourism sites to create conversation with children that they are part of nature, not separate from it. This way play-based learning in nature allows children to co-design their own experiences and activities in natural environments the way they want.

Storytelling is a powerful practice for play-based learning in environmental education aimed at young children as it allows children to learn with nature and create stories based on their own learning experiences with the natural world. It helps children to understand their own relationship with nature and form a personal connection with it. Thus, storytelling also helps children to develop a sense of place.

To conclude, play in ecotourism sites

is seen as a way to help children learn about nature and form a relationship with it in order to develop pro-environmental values and attitudes. Adult guidance is an important part of play in nature and learning about nature. Whereas, free and independent play provides an opportunity through spontaneous encounters with the natural world to learn with nature, and storytelling helps children to position themselves as part of it.

How can ecotourism sites then use play-based learning as an educational practice to support children-nature relationships?

Essentially, they should incorporate play-based pedagogies in their education programmes. They can encourage child-led nature play opportunities by providing space for free nature play, organise nature play groups or allow nature-based kindergartens (such as forest schools and bush kindergartens) to utilise their space.

Play spaces and activities should be safe and designed or selected with learning and development principals in mind, allowing children to engage with nature independently and spontaneously.

Finally, storytelling practices should be incorporated in educational programmes

and play activities. It is important to provide opportunities for children to create stories from their interaction with nature and to share the stories with others.

Reference:

Heli King , José-Carlos García-Rosell & Steve Noakes (2020): Promoting children-nature relations through play-based learning in ecotourism sites, *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism*, DOI: 10.1080/15313220.2020.1797612

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Bottom of Page: Photo by Marika Strand

Below: Photo by Yvonne Parsons



WORTH PROTECTING? FIELD SURVEYS CAN HELP

Steven Prowse, Sheena Gilman & Paul Donatiu
Protect the Bush Alliance

NPAQ, in conjunction with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, awarded Protect the Bush Alliance (PTBA) the inaugural 2018/2019 Jim Cuthbertson grant to help fund surveys of selected high conservation value state forests to consider if better protection is warranted.

The survey work was undertaken in Yabba State Forest, Presho State Forest, and Belington Hut State Forest; Eungella National Park and surrounds were also surveyed.

The work involved 35 people surveying flora and fauna over a total of 162 days. The findings demonstrate the vulnerability and value in protecting the biodiversity of these areas.

Yabba State Forest

Yabba State Forest has a diverse range of habitats including remnant forest that may never have been burnt. This area is an important link between Wrattens National Park and Conondale National Park.

Extensive flora and fauna surveys identified 80 bird species, 10 mammals, 8 microbats, and 132 native plant species including the Vulnerable Glossy Black Cockatoos, Black-Breasted Button Quails, cycads, orchids and Brush Sophora.

The species diversity, threatened species habitat, and proximity within a State significant biodiversity corridor complete a compelling argument to transition this area to national park. Support for transition this area to national park has been obtained

from both the former and current Environment Minister.

Presho State Forest and Belington Hut State Forest

These state forests link Blackdown Tablelands National Park, Humboldt National Park and Expedition National Park and include important woodland ecosystems. The landscape was very dry and large parts were burnt in the 2019/20 summer. The avian diversity and abundance was lower than expected, most likely due to the dry conditions.

Bird species identified included four species of Honeyeater, two Lorikeets, and two Finches.

Belington Hut State Forest also houses one of the largest colonies of flying foxes in Australia (about 900,000 individuals).

Eungella National Park and Surrounds

The survey of Eungella National Park and surrounds found that the Eungella Honeyeater was not present at woodland sites, despite past records, and that populations were variable across rainforest sites. The variation indicates that habitat quality and availability of nectar sources impact the habitat range of this species.

Severe drought and climate change impacts to the flowering season and associated nectar availability are affecting the habitat range of this species in the area.

Other species identified during

the survey work included Platypus, Swamp Wallabys, Brush-Tailed Possum, Eungella Broad-tailed Gecko, Great Barred Frog, 96 bird species, and about 100 native plant species.

The work in Eungella National Park and surrounding areas was conducted as a collaboration between Birdlife Mackay, Birdlife Southern Queensland and PTBA with support from the Australian Birdlife Environment Foundation.

The survey also coincided with Eungella Bird Week that was convened to support citizen science monitoring in areas of high conservation value.

Follow up survey work, associated with this wet season, is expected to identify many more species at all sites. Protect the Bush Alliance also plan to survey Durikai State Forest.

Further information about PTBA can be found at www.ptba.net.au.

HELP



Banner: Oche Falls, Yabba State Forest Photo: Steven Prowse. **Left to Right from Top:** Black-breasted Button Quail Photo: A. Nielson, Oche Falls Photo: Steven Prowse, Cycads Photo: Paul Donatiu, Volunteers at Yabba State Forest Photo: Supplied, Eungella Honeyeater Photo: John Brinnand, Fire Scarred Woodlands at Eungella National Park Photo Supplied.

PARK IN FOCUS

Wiliyan-ngurru National Park

Jenna Huckenswager - NPAQ Volunteer

Earlier this year the National Park formerly known as Camooweal Caves National Park, returned to its original Indigenous name - Wiliyan-ngurru National Park. The name comes from the First Nations term for the rough-tailed goanna.

Traditionally Wiliyan-ngurru National Park is associated with and traversed by a number of ancestral spirits referred to as Dreamings. The Dreamings within the park form part of a large range of sacred and significant sites to the Indjalandji-Dhidhanu people. The return to the indigenous name recognises the co-stewardship of the park between the state government and the Indjalandji-Dhidhanu people.

The park is located approximately 24km south of Camooweal in north-western Queensland and 188km north-west of Mount Isa.

The park represents the Barkly Tablelands Bioregion and is 13,800 hectares of Mitchell grass plains and spinifex and turpentine wattle shrublands and open eucalypt woodlands. It features caves and sinkholes that formed when water percolated through 500-million-year-old layers of dolomite and created cabins and vertical shafts that in some places are up to 75m deep. The caves within the park are part of a much broader cave and underground river system.

There are walks that lead up to two caves, the Little Nowranie Cave (70m return), and the Great Nowranie Cave (220m return), which has a viewing platform over the entrance. Access inside the caves is currently restricted and can only be via guided tours with commercial operators.

The caves are home to the endangered Ghost Bat (NCA 1992; Listed as Vulnerable under the EPBC Act 1999), the vulnerable Orange leaf-nosed bat (NCA 1992), other insect-eating bats, and owls.

The park also contains a variety of waterholes, some seasonal, including the Nowranie Waterhole, where remote bush camping is allowed through commercial operators, and a day use picnic area is located. These waterholes, as well as the park at large, attract a range of birdlife including spoonbills, cormorants, herons and ducks. Of particular interest is the rare Freckled Duck, and the near threatened Carpentaria Grasswren.

The unique landscapes of Wiliyan-ngurru National Park are well worth a trip out to if visiting the area.

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Butterworth, K. (2021) Indigenous sacred site Camooweal Caves National Park officially recognised under traditional name. ABC North West QLD. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-01/camooweal-caves-national-park-renamed-as-wiliyan-ngurru/13171292?utm_source=abc_news_web&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_content=link&utm_campaign=abc_news_web

QLD Government (2013) Camooweal Caves National Park Management Statement 2013. Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing.

QLD Government (2019) Wildnet Database Species Profiles <https://apps.des.qld.gov.au/species-search/>



Above: Nowranie Waterhole. Photo: QLD Government. **Banner:** The Great Nowranie Cave. Photo: Marco Bracchi - Isaeagle Photography <https://marcobracchi.smugmug.com/>

SAVING BIMBLEBOX



Sharyn Munro - The Bimblebox Alliance Inc.

The history of Bimblebox Refuge began when the almost 8,000 hectare Glen Innes Station, 95% uncleared, was bought in 2000 by a group of concerned citizens and nearby landowners.

In recognition of its high conservation values, the Federal Government wanted the property to be part of the National Reserve System of Protected Areas, and contributed two-thirds of the purchase price.

A legally binding Agreement over Bimblebox Nature Refuge 'in perpetuity' was then signed with the Qld Government in 2003.

Bimblebox became an ongoing research base for long-term science projects, notably from Queensland Herbarium. It offers a rare example of property management with a strong focus on biodiversity conservation in co-existence with cattle production.

Located in the Desert Uplands, a Biodiversity Hotspot, but where less than 5% of the area is held in conservation reserves, it is a treasure-house of flora and fauna, with 176 bird species identified already.

But in 2007 came the shock that

Waratah Coal wanted to develop a massive open cut and underground thermal coal mine on Bimblebox. 2008 saw exploratory drilling begin, and Clive Palmer become the owner of Waratah Coal.

After the major tasks of responding to an EIS and SEIS, in late 2013, Bimblebox supporters learnt that the Galilee Coal Project (aka China First Mine) was approved by State and Federal Governments (approval is viable until 2073). Since then, land clearing around Bimblebox has continued.

In 2014 the Bimblebox Alliance Inc. (TBA) was established as it had become clear that a formal alliance of Bimblebox supporters would be needed to combat this biggest threat to Bimblebox and other areas of high conservation and cultural values – the approval of mine developments and related infrastructure.

Under the Queensland Nature Conservation Act 1992, Nature Refuges can be mined and offset to 'compensate' for the loss of significant ecological resources if economically viable coal reserves are found. This contravenes the guidelines of the

International Convention on Biological Diversity treaty which advises no mining of IUCN Class VI Protected Areas where such values would be impacted, or offsetting in such areas which are protected for perpetuity.

The threat loomed, but there was no further action from Waratah Coal until late 2019, when they applied for a Mining Lease and Environmental Authority.

Represented by the Environmental Defenders Office, TBA lodged notice of objection in the Land Court. See (TBA's Objections [here](#)). Our co-objectors are Youth Verdict, especially concerned with the Human Rights of young people, considering coal's role in climate change. Waratah Coal applied to have the Human Rights objections struck out, but the Land Court rejected that (28.8.2020).

As the actual court case will not be until mid 2021, this will be a long battle, on many fronts!

TBA's elected Management Committee are all volunteers, with Refuge co-owner Paola Cassoni as President. We are providing background research for the EDO, having on board such knowledgeable people as Patricia Julien and Sheena Gillman.

They raise funds for the case, and for needed work on the Refuge basic visitor camp facilities so people can stay and see for themselves what must be saved. The recent Chuffed campaign raised over \$23,000 for such an upgrade.

TBA are working with videographer Mark Doyle to make a series of five short videos. The first, 'Saving Bimblebox', narrated by Prof. Ian Lowe, was launched in August, receiving much acclaim and wide sharing on Facebook.

You can follow TBA's progress in this ongoing fight for Nature by subscribing to their e-newsletters. Visiting their [website](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).



Above: Bimblebox Alliance Campaign Poster. Banner: Bimblebox Fauna Photo: Greg Harm.

WILDLIFE FEATURE

Southern Pink Underwing Moth

Dr Mark Nadir Runkovski - Natura Pacific

There is a plant out there hidden amongst South-East Queensland's national parks that you may not have heard of. It's called *Carronia* (not Carona!) *multisepealea*, or the Carronia vine. While it's indistinct little flowers, straggly vine-like growth and elbow-shaped leaf-stalks are not immediately awe-inspiring, the plant plays a critical role in the life-cycle of something far more dazzling, *Phyllodes imperialis* subsp. *smithersi* or in easier language, the Southern pink underwing moth. Both the Carronia vine and the pink underwing moth occur in Springbrook National Park and Lamington National Park.

This moth grows to an impressive 16cm across (wing-tip to wing-tip) and is roughly the same size as a fully-grown female Richmond birdwing butterfly (*Ornithoptera richmondia*). As well as its size, the moth has another striking feature, its colouring. The front-wings are deep brown with incredible markings that make the wings look just like a dead leaf. It is extremely well camouflaged when it sits motionless, wings closed, during daylight hours. If the moth gets startled, it reveals its hind-wings which

are blotched with fluorescent pink!

The caterpillars are one of the world's most exotic and eccentric-looking. The caterpillar grows to an impressive size (10-12cm long) and has an opal-like colouring of brown, beige, aqua and pink. Like most caterpillars, its head is relatively small and indistinct, however, right behind the head are a couple of fleshy segments that have white 'tooth-like' markings and feature two large blue false eyes with prominent black pupils. When you give this guy a fright, be prepared for a shock of your own. When startled the larva lunges forward folding its real head inside the fleshy upper segments engorging its false teeth and eyes. The caterpillar has evolved these markings to keep its otherwise tasty body safe from birds and other predators.

Like all moth and butterfly caterpillars, the Southern pink underwing moth larva is fussy when it comes to food. It has developed a special relationship with the carronia vine, which is the sole plant species that its larvae can eat. Unfortunately, as our native rainforests have been cleared and replaced with cities and farms, the carronia vine has also disappeared,

and the moth with it.

This is not a story that is unique to these two species. So what can we do to help reverse this decline in the carronia vine and the Southern pink underwing moth?

Natura Pacific are working with Native Plants Queensland's Dr Bonni Yee and retired honorary CSIRO fellow Dr Don Sands, to propagate 10,000 carronia vines to repopulate suitable rainforests across South-East Queensland and connecting to our National Parks will be critical to this project. Growing the vine from seed has been a great challenge, consequently, stem cuttings are being used instead. Once grown, male and female carronia vines along with a small syzygium or lillipilli species will be provided to local councils and private landholders within the moth's native range. The vines will provide the foodplants for the caterpillars and the lillipilli, the food for the adults, which like to suck the sugars from damaged and decaying rainforest fruits.

The aim is establish healthy, genetically-vigorous male and female vines along with fruiting lillipillis to increase potential breeding spots for the moth. Ultimately, the hope is to replicate the huge success of the Richmond birdwing butterfly and vine project nurtured by Dr Don Sands throughout the past 20 years.

To register your interest in planting the vines on your property please email the project coordinator mark.runkovski@natura-pacific.com.



Banner: Moth Caterpillar Photo: Dr Mark Nadir Runkovski Above: Adult Moth Photo: Mark Graham

To learn more about other threatened plants and animals in Queensland check out Natura Pacific's 'Back from the Brink' videos and podcasts www.natura-pacific.com/resources or search "Natura Pacific Back from the Brink" on Facebook, YouTube and Spotify.

THE NATIONAL PARK EXPERIENCE

Personal reflection on why our parks must be valued

Judith Hunter
Strategic Development Manager, YFS

Our Sunday bushwalks over the past year have brought respite and relief for my husband and me. They've been a sanity saver (and possibly a marriage maintainer!). As we set out each Sunday we'd be talking about stress stuff: the pandemic, US politics, work, the kids but gradually we'd get quieter, calmer and stiller as we walked.

During the height of COVID-19 restrictions in Brisbane we still managed to get to Mt Coot-tha most weekends for our authorised exercise, discovering new sections of the park and venturing into D'Aguiar National Park and the Seqwater territory on foot as we explored further. We established that tracks like Hell Hole Break and Scorpion are much more attractive than they sound.

Every week I felt so lucky to have this beautiful treasure so close to home.

Once restrictions lifted, we pushed further afield, exploring more of D'Aguiar National Park and Lamington National Parks. We've even done a couple of overnights in D'Aguiar exploring the "remote" bush camps (much less difficult to access than their name implies). Sleeping in the bush on a breezy moonlit night and waking to bird song was a world away from our inner-city normal.

We had planned some interstate and international trips but thanks to the coronavirus we've explored the parks and paths of our own area instead. Within 200km of Brisbane there are such riches that we had overlooked or ignored until now. South East

Queensland's National Parks have become a source of adventure, anticipation and pleasure for me.

A recent foray into the Sunshine Coast Hinterland Great Walk with a group of intrepid "trekerettes" was a chance to explore sections of this walk without a huge pack. From a base in Montville, we organised an under-employed local wedding transport firm to drop us at a different access point each day and pick us up after about 12km of walking through diverse landscapes.

These women – all National Parks Aficionados – really knew how to immerse themselves in the experience, with regular breaks for sketching, stretching, birdwatching, plant identification or just looking. The track crosses or follows roads at intervals making it easy to do it in

chunks. We have since done a return trip to enjoy some of the sections we didn't get to.

In October my husband and I celebrated our 25 year wedding anniversary by heading out to explore the area around Boonah. The Mt Cordeaux/ Bare Rock area in the Main Range National Park was beautiful, and the Palm Gorge on Mt Greville in the Moogerah Peaks was fascinating.

There are so many more walks to explore in South-East Queensland that I've never done despite their proximity to home. I'm negotiating to reduce my work to a nine-day fortnight so I have more time to fit in all the trips I want to do!

Thanks to NPAQ and Queensland National Parks staff for making this therapeutic option so readily available to us.



Above: Trekerettes on the Sunshine Coast Hinterland Great Walk Photo: Supplied.

RANGER SPOTLIGHT

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

Ben Hall
Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS)

Ben Hall is Ranger in Charge of Eungella National Park in the Mackay Management Unit. He has always enjoyed exploring the outdoors, in particular new remote places. He could think of no better profession to do this, and help protect the environment, than becoming a Ranger!

How long have you worked in national parks?

I have worked for QPWS for 19 years.

Which parks have you worked in?

I have worked mostly around the Mackay and Whitsunday regions in some beautiful national parks and State forests, including Brampton Island NP, South Cumberland Islands NP, Whitsundays Islands NP, Conway NP, Eungella NP, Cape Hillsborough NP and Cape Palmerston NP. Working in various roles, I've encountered many rewarding challenges and had the opportunity to be a part of the protection of some very special parks in the Mackay Region that will be around for future generations to enjoy.

What is special about your current park?

Eungella National Park is the longest stretch of sub-tropical rainforest in Australia and one of Queensland's most ecologically diverse parks – home to some special endemic species. The remote sections of Eungella are magnificent! As you climb 700m onto the Clarke Range, the landscape changes and gives rise to dense sub-tropical rainforest and escarpments with deep gorges and crystal clear mountain creeks!

What is your most memorable moment as a ranger?

I have had so many unforgettable experiences while working with QPWS! My most memorable include conducting reef health surveys on the Great Barrier Reef, participating in feral animal control programs on St Bees and South Percy islands and helping build the Great Walk through Conway National Park.

I'd also count undertaking fire management among my most memorable experiences! This includes suppressing large wildfires on Homevale National Park and conducting broad scale aerial planned burns across 100,000 hectares of protected area in the Mackay Highlands. The mosaic broad scale burning across the Mackay Highlands has been a great success over the last three years, as it has created a reduced and varied age class of fuel across the parks. Wildfires caused by lightning strikes have been low intensity and quite manageable since the aerial burning has been implemented.

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

The best part is having the opportunity to help preserve and improve the condition of our national parks for future generations to enjoy, while protecting the values that make our protected areas special.

Can you describe your favourite national parks experience?

Camping on Scawfell Island would have to be one of my favorite national parks experiences. Scawfell is approximately 26 nautical miles from



Above: QPWS Ranger Ben Hall. Photo: © Queensland Government. Top: Sky Window Walk Lookout, Eungella National Park. Photo: © Tamara Vallance

Mackay and is part of the South Cumberland Islands National Park. Refuge Bay has a beautiful sandy beach, pristine fringing reef and is a popular anchorage for yachts. If you climb to the peak of the island you get amazing views across the South Cumberland Island group!

What is your top tip for visitors to your park?

Pre-plan your journey! When setting off on the longer more remote walks, be prepared and know the difficulty of the walk. Ensure you have adequate supplies, clothing, water and a basic first aid kit. Let someone know where and when you are going and when you intend to return. Carry a Personal Locator Beacon.

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

NPAQ activities

Bird Watching - Ross Road Parklands, Upper Kedron

Date: 18 April 2021

Meet: 7:30am - 85 Ross Rd, Upper Kedron

Cost: \$5

Leader: Ian Peacock (0416 943 280 or ianpeacock@hotmail.com)

Social Walk - Spring Hill Heritage Trail

Date: 5 May 2021

Meet: 9:30am - Central Station Brisbane CBD

Cost: \$5

Leader: Laurelle Lowry (0480 153 617 or onthewallaby@live.com.au)

Bushwalk - Brisbane Valley Rail Trail - Benarkin to Linville

Date: 16 May 2021

Meet: 7:30am - George Street, Linville

Cost: \$5

Leader: Frank Freeman (0427 655 514 or frank_fr@bigpond.net.au)

2021 Vegetation Management Group

Meet: 9:00am - the lower car park of Jolly's Lookout of D'Aguiar National Park.

What to bring: Gloves, protective clothing, eye protection, insect repellent, sunscreen, water, morning tea, and lunch.

Dates: Saturday 24 April 2021, Saturday 22 May 2021

NPAQ events

NPAQ Members' Meeting

Date: Saturday 22 May 2021

Time: 9:15am for 9:30am start

Venue: Lithuanian Hall, 49 Gladstone Rd, Highgate Hill

Vale

NPAQ is saddened by the passing of life member Althea Williams. Althea has been a member since 1955 and helped to maintain the NPAQ library. Despite her deteriorating health Althea never lost touch and when she lost the ability to read, had her son read Protected to her.

We were also saddened by the passing of life members Geoff Goadby and Don Cumming. Geoff joined NPAQ in 1971. Don and his wife Vivienne joined NPAQ in 1964 and became life members in 1985.

NPAQ is also saddened by the passing of long-term member Ian Webb who joined NPAQ in 1965, and former member Margaret Wood, whom joined NPAQ in 1963.

We send our sincere condolences to their friends and families.



Above: The Great Nowranie Cave, Willyun-ngurru National Park. Photo: Ryan Francis.

Celebrating 90 years.

