

protected



Magazine of National Parks Association of Queensland

state of the park

national park priorities 2015-2018

lamington national park

baroon pocket to kondalilla falls walk

black-throated finch

the national park experience

Issue 1 February-March 2015



Welcome to Protected

Michelle Prior, NPAQ President

I am delighted to welcome you to the first edition of Protected, the magazine of NPAQ. The magazine coincides with the introduction of Neck of the Woods, NPAQ's new weekly ebuletin.

Speaking of change, we welcome the Hon Steven Miles MP as Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef, and Minister for the Environment.

National parks are the sign of an enlightened and healthy society. After the problems facing the environment were recognised several decades ago, the focus shifted to finding solutions. In nature conservation, national parks and other protected areas were regarded as key solutions to preserving our wonderful biodiversity and unique natural landscapes.

However, recent events reignited the need for re-selling the value of national parks. In many instances, the preserved lands again became the threatened lands. Reclaimed from the past for the legacy of the future, the present interposed with short-term requests. Whilst recognising the diversity of opinions and values in society, it is however essential to recognise the true value of national parks, and recognise that once conservation values are lost, they rarely can be re-gained.

This edition features an overview of the State of Parks in Qld. The snowball effect of the recent unravelling of environmental protection not only led to the downgrading of conservation, but to confusion of the very purpose of national parks.

Queensland's national parks are stories of wonderful achievement. The challenge now lies in capitalising on the leverage to be gained in truly valuing our irreplaceable places, to ensure that nature is Protected.

Thank you for remaining committed to the conservation and gentle appreciation of nature.

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Cover - Coomera and Yarrabilgong Falls, Lamington National Park (Damian Caniglia).

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State of the Park

Paul Donatiu, NPAQ Principal Advocate

National parks are the foundation of biodiversity conservation in this State and across Australia. Only national parks and other conservation areas fully protect our unique plants, animals and landscapes, and enable threatened species to survive. From early 2012 to late 2014, national parks in Queensland came under siege from numerous quarters and were asked to fulfil roles that they were never designed for. Not only has this damaged the national parks brand, but confused the very purpose of parks themselves.

This article explores some of the primary challenges currently faced by national parks in Queensland.

Growing the national park estate

National parks in Queensland currently cover approximately 5% of the State. By comparison, the national average is approaching 10% and the international Convention on Biological Diversity target's (to which Australia is a signatory) is 17% of the Australian landmass preserved in protected areas. As this article goes to press, none of the 12 national reserve system (NRS) properties purchased by the Bligh ALP government have been gazetted, all locked into the deliberations of a Protected Area Review during the last three years, the recommendations of which are unlikely to see the light of day. Collectively, these properties cost almost \$27m to acquire, with two-thirds of the funding

coming from the now defunct federal government's National Reserve System program. These lands - all in regions with few national parks - provide wonderful habitat for endangered birds such as Gouldian and Black-throated Finches (latter described on pg12), new species of plants, include amazing gorges, and protect the headwaters of several of our mighty Gulf rivers. Their gazettal would go a long way to conserve some of the remaining 18% of threatened plants and animals in Queensland that have no formal protection in national parks.

On the positive side of the ledger, the Newman LNP government saw six properties acquired as national park with several others under contract and investigation. Another 10 properties were purchased as national park using koala acquisitions funding, with all 10 adjoining existing parks. Like the 12 NRS properties, none of these properties have been gazetted.

The main impediment to gazettal remains mining interests. While the physical footprint of actual mining is relatively small (<2% of Queensland), mining exploration permits cover a massive 82% of the State. In short, these permits must be inactive for a minimum period of five years and then retired in order for a gazettal to proceed. Of the 12 NRS properties, only two are free of exploration permits. The solution proposed in the past has been to gazette the components of these properties that are permit-free, and declare the remainder Regional

Park until the mining interests can be retired. Although a compromise, this provides one path forward to commence the gazettal process.

Parks not paddocks

In May 2013, after a prolonged period of drought, the then Newman LNP government decided that five national parks (Blackbraes, Forest Den, Mazeppa, Moorrinya and Nairana) and eight national reserve system properties would be made available to graziers under a hardship grazing program. It was argued that not only would these lands provide fodder for cattle, but that grazing would assist in managing introduced grasses in these 13 protected areas. Conservationists were assured that strict grazing regimes would be adhered to in order to manage the impact of grazing on native flora and fauna, and that the habitat of endangered animals found in these parks would be protected. Ironically, many of the plans created to recover these species clearly state that grazing is one of the principal threats to their survival.

By August, the transformation of these protected areas into cow paddocks was almost complete. Trees and understorey vegetation had been cleared to erect new boundary fencing at Moorrinya and Blackbraes National Parks, watering points installed and some internal fencing put in place. By November, large sections of Forest Den and Moorrinya National Parks had been grazed down to bare earth,



completely removing all understorey habitat and leaving nothing for local wildlife. The damage was extensive, not localized to high traffic areas such as watering points, and it appeared that the permit system and associated stocking rates decreed by the government had been breached.

After a sustained media campaign, the cattle came off national parks by the end of 2013, and off the national reserve properties by June 2014. In the public's eyes, it appeared that grazing was no longer an issue on national parks. But what is out of sight, is truly out of mind. During the latter half of 2014, NPAQ continued to receive reports from concerned landholders about cattle intrusions in national parks. A cursory search of encumbrances on these and other parks unearthed over 30 grazing leases covering almost 100,000 hectares on 11 national parks. How could this be so? As part of regional forestry agreements, some state forests were made national park. At the time of gazettal, some of these new national parks carried grazing leases; many were for an original period of 50 years and allowed to continue. In addition, when some national parks were purchased, some graziers negotiated to graze part of the new national park for a limited time period as part of the purchase arrangements. The actual number of national parks still affected by grazing today is almost certainly much higher than 11.

Grazing national parks is a bad idea. It directly threatens the survival of rare animals and plants, and studies indicate that there is no net benefit to conservation from grazing exotic species, such as buffel grass, in national parks. Grazing does not promote the wide regeneration of native plants that fire does, and inevitably leads to a reduction in the diversity of native plants. Rather, there is the very real risk that cattle actually introduce new weeds, and spread existing weeds, in national parks.

A changing climate

In 2010, conservation groups and the then Bligh ALP government sought to establish a biodiversity strategy in Queensland that anticipated the likely impacts of a changing climate. Part of this strategy was to determine how best to make additions to a static national park system against the backdrop of the highly variable impacts that changes in climate would bring.

In the northern hemisphere, many conservation groups and governments continue to promote the establishment of migratory landscape scale corridors as mechanisms to conserve biodiversity and maintain ecosystem function. Think of Yellowstone to Yukon, the Meso-American Biological Corridor and the Pan European Green Corridor Network to name a few. Locally, there is little evidence to support widespread species migration in response to past climate oscillations, a relatively flat landscape that would

have forced latitudinal migration over vast distances, and a distinct lack of the large iconic migratory fauna found in North America or Europe. In Australia there remains the very real risk that landscape corridor projects overstate the migratory, and therefore climate adaptation benefits of such linkages.

In a visionary and unheralded move, the Newman LNP government continued to expand the national park estate while giving full consideration to a changing climate. By using the latest climate research from the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility, new national park acquisitions focussed on areas that demonstrated resilience to climate impacts, that protected refugia, and that consolidated existing protected areas (by buffering, building core habitat areas, and establishing short corridors). Continuation of this strategy provides the best opportunity for our unique plants and animals to persist in the landscape.

Managing protected areas

A recent research project investigating the costs and drivers of national park management in Queensland found that parks are performing poorly on protecting biodiversity with most funds being allocated to visitor management. The project found that most national parks performed poorly or fairly on biodiversity related functions such as weed and pest management and the monitoring of natural values,



but that most performed well on the functions related to visitor facilities and management. The implication here is that as budgets shrink, managers are forced to choose what management activities they will resource. Often they cannot decrease visitor related activities due to safety issues and complaints from the public, so instead the management of natural values declines.

The research has highlighted the growing gap between current levels of funding and the funding required to manage national parks well. Not only are visitor numbers one of the main drivers of the costs of park management, but managing visitors is expensive compared to caring for biodiversity. Any policy to increase park visitation will disproportionately increase pressure on existing budgets.

There has been no net increase in operational funding for national park management during the last three years. In addition, total numbers of QPWS Rangers have dropped from

approximately 820 to 750, and QPWS support staff from 300 to 200, a dire situation when national parks are predicted to grow by at least 700,000 ha in the near future. Meanwhile, longstanding management issues such as feral species, the balanced application of fire, and the maintenance of boundary fencing remain. In addition, cat and fox infestations continue to proliferate in the absence of top predators, and the number one driver of weed infestations remains roads. Clearly operational funding for National Parks needs to be significantly increased during this term of state government.

The commercialisation of national parks

The Newman LNP government also moved quickly to include commercial activity as an object in the Nature Conservation Act, laying a platform for resorts, zip-lines and similar activities to occur in national parks. Never before had the very foundation of what constitutes an acceptable activity in a national park been so redefined. When it comes to assessing appropriate development in parks, resorts are a case in point.

Across the world there is little evidence of market demand for resorts in national parks. Indeed less than 1% of the 20,000 national parks worldwide have any significant tourism infrastructure of a comparable nature. Resorts confuse public access to public land with the exclusive use

associated with private facilities, and their development undermines the naturalness of parks and risks eroding their attractiveness to tourists. Resorts also attract effort and resources away from other national park management priorities - a commercial investment must be protected from fire, have good access roads and attract services such as walking tracks. The Queensland economy already gains over \$4b a year from tourists visiting national parks, without any need to develop parks. A more preferable situation would be encouraging tourism providers to buy and develop land next to national parks, and protect that land under a nature refuge agreement.

Like grazing, the commercialization of national parks detracts from the park brand and threatens the very founding principles that led to the creation of these unique places.

National parks and other protected areas are the jewels in Australia's conservation crown. Not only do they conserve and protect biodiversity, but form the basis of our economic and social wellbeing, attracting millions of visitors annually and delivering ecosystem services that have immense value. National parks deliver tourism revenue, improved health, disaster mitigation, clean water, food security, cultural heritage and climate control. It is up to us to ensure that their primary conservation role is never compromised.



Cool burn, Main Range National Park (Paul Donatiu)



National park priorities 2015-2018

Paul Donatiu, NPAQ Principal Advocate

The dust has well and truly settled from the January State election and a Palaszczuk ALP government is in office. Paul Donatiu discusses priority national park issues for this term, including some overarching concerns, the continued growth of the national park estate and park management.

Broad concerns

The separation of national parks from the environment portfolio was one of the most polarizing actions of the previous State Government. Thankfully the new government has established a single encompassing ministerial portfolio that includes environment, heritage, national parks, and the Great Barrier Reef, and maintained the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service as a distinct entity. National park acquisitions and management are a step closer to full integration, and the portfolio lays a strong foundation for recognizing the role that the environment plays in the well-being and prosperity of all Queenslanders.

The restoration of the State's Biodiversity Strategy is a logical companion to this portfolio. Labor introduced Queensland's first Biodiversity Strategy in 2011. The State requires a visionary document that articulates how the landscapes and wildlife of Queensland will be protected for the generations of Queenslanders to come. National parks will always be a foundation

component of this Strategy, not least because of their proven role in protecting wildlife. Only national parks offer protection from mining and development, and prevent species such as the Northern hairy nosed wombat (Epping Forest National Park) and the Bridled nail-tail wallaby (Taunton National Park) from going extinct.

Equally important is the reinstatement of the cardinal principle that governs national park management. This principle states:

To provide, to the greatest possible extent, for the permanent preservation of the area's natural condition and the protection of the area's cultural resources and values.

How and why this principle was introduced provides a useful context for understanding its application today:

The cardinal principle was first enshrined in legislation in 1959 (Forestry Act 1959) by a Coalition government, incorporated into subsequent legislation by the Bjelke-Petersen government and later incorporated into the Nature Conservation Act 1992 by the Labor government. The legal and ethical strength of the cardinal principle is the foundation on which national park management has been built since it was introduced in 1959. The principle clearly establishes that the primary purpose of national parks is nature conservation, with

other uses being subordinate to that purpose. It has been the foundation for the exclusion of activities involving introduced species and the establishment of facilitieswhich are not consistent with protection of an area's natural resources.

Ogilvie (2014)

The principle provides an important lens for assessing potential threats to the management of national parks such as resorts, horse-riding, zip-lines and cattle grazing. If these activities constitute a threat to the permanent preservation of a national park's natural condition and the protection of its cultural resources and values, then they are not appropriate for a national park. NPAQ notes that the policy platform adopted by the ALP at its 2014 State Conference clearly states that Labor will reject any proposal for development in, or in the vicinity of, a national park or protected area if the proposed development is likely to have a significant adverse impact on conservation. It goes on to state that Labor will ensure activities within national parks and protected areas are assessed according to the precautionary principle.

Growing national parks and other protected areas

Notwithstanding gains made during the last three years, national parks have poor coverage in Queensland compared to other State and Territories, and there remain



large gaps in the representation of threatened ecosystems and wildlife. It is critical that a new State Government prioritises the protection of wildlife and their habitat as a legacy to future generations of Australians. NPAQ notes that the current State Government recognises the Convention on Biological Diversity target to preserve 17% of the Australian landmass as protected area estate (5.20) and has committed to securing and conserving representative and viable samples of all bio-geographical regions of the state in the NP estate and moving towards this.

One means of doing this is to transfer high conservation value state forests to national park, especially in bioregions where park coverage is below the State average. During the Bligh Government, more than 30 State Forests covering 1.2m ha in central Queensland were earmarked for transfer to national park. These forests have numerous values. For example, on simple measures such as overall eucalypt species richness, Barakula State Forest has a greater number of eucalypts



Eucalypt forest, Barakula State Forest (Paul Donatiu)

than any national park in central or southeast Queensland. The number of eucalypt taxa from Carnarvon to Isla Gorge and Blackdown Tableland totals 85 species, which is similar to the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (90 species) for which listing was based significantly on eucalypt diversity.

Another practical tool to expand protected areas in Queensland has been the Nature Refuge Program. By agreeing to a conservation covenant on the title of their land, 492 Nature Refuge landholders currently contribute 3,995,000 hectares of land to the preservation of nature. Nature Refuge landholders are modern day stewards of the bush, but often suffer the imposts of mining and development on their land. A ban on mining in places such as Bimblebox Nature Refuge, and legislative change, is required to ensure that nature refuges with significant environmental values are given the same level of protection as a national park. In addition, a higher class of nature refuge would recognize the efforts of private conservation groups, such as Bush Heritage and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, whose reserves also have commensurate values to national parks.

Managing protected areas

At present, the management of protected areas in Queensland is guided by a management plan

or statement. While individual management plans are useful for iconic high visitation parks, Bioregional Management Plans would enable QPWS Regional Directors to prioritize operational resources to specific management issues in their region, e.g. the elimination of a particular weed species at its source before it spreads through a catchment. Retaining individual plans for high visitation national parks, with clear guidelines on carrying capacity, would provide a means of managing the impact on their natural values. Other management issues include the loss of QPWS staff, the centralization of regional staff, and the contraction of operational funding. All have conspired to give the appearance that national parks are poorly managed, threatening the very ability of parks to retain the values that they were gazetted for in the first place.

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PARK IN FOCUS

Lamington National Park - A century of wonder

Denis McMullen, NPAQ member

A high plateau of wonder: thick rainforest vegetation, towering trees often mist-shrouded, fallen trunks browning to decay; paths snaking through forest twilight punctuated by brilliant sunshine through canopy breaks. Gullies overflowing with tree ferns reflecting green light; fern shadows on the path creating intriguing patterns; giant moss-laden trees with strongly buttressed trunks, vines and lianas, strangler figs creating medieval patterns around their host trees, rocky creeks and waterfalls. Everywhere, tumultuous, riotous growth. Birdsong and counter-calls from on-high, brush turkey scuttling through the undergrowth, then sudden overwhelming vistas of lush valleys.

Lamington National Park is part of the Shield Volcano Group of the World Heritage listed Gondwana Rainforests, inscribed in 1986, and added to the National Heritage List in 2007.

Rainforest, the most ancient vegetation in Australia, once covered most of the ancient super continent Gondwana. The remnant rainforests provide an interesting living link with the evolution of Australia. Few places on earth contain so many plants and animals which remain relatively unchanged from their ancestors in the fossil record.

The Park is located in the Gold Coast hinterland, on the Lamington Plateau, part of the McPherson Range, 30 km

from the Pacific Ocean and 110 kms south from Brisbane. At elevations from 700 metres in the north to over 1000 metres in the southern section, the National Park protects one of the most diverse areas of vegetation in the country within its 206 km².

It was not the first proclaimed park in Queensland. That honour goes to Witches Falls (1908) which is now a section of the much larger Mt Tamborine National Park. Lamington National Park was proclaimed on 31st July, 1915 and named after Lord Lamington, who was Governor of Queensland from 1896 to 1902.

The McPherson Range is a relic of the huge, 23 million year old Tweed Volcano which is centred on Mt Warning, a remnant volcanic plug. The large shield volcano was over 100 km in diameter, extending from Mt Tamborine in the north to Lismore in the south. The erosion caldera of the Tweed Shield Volcano is the largest in the world and is remarkable for its size, prominent central mountain mass (Mount Warning) and because the caldera floor has been eroded down to basement rock by the Tweed river.

The pre-settlement history of the forests of the Lamington plateau indicates extensive usage for food collecting by the Wangerriburras and Nerangballum peoples on forays from the surrounding lush and fertile valleys. The nearby Numinbah valley was also used as an access route for

people travelling from the south east to the bunya nut festivals each year.

Following Captain James Cook's naming of Mt Warning in 1770, and exploration by Logan and Cunningham, early European occupation of the area centred on farming. Forestry became significant with the arrival of David Lahey, who helped to pioneer the sawmill at Canungra that sought hoop pine, silky oak and the very valuable Australian Red Cedar.

The creation of Queensland's premier National Park was the outcome of a long campaign by dedicated people who knew and admired its rainforest, plateaus, soaring cliffs and extensive vistas and its special flora and fauna. This campaign was initiated by Robert Martin Collins, the son of a landowner at 'Mundoolin' on the Albert River. He was born in 1843 and, in his early life, he gained a sensitive appreciation of the bush. He and his brother explored and developed a deep love for the McPherson Range.

In 1878, Collins visited the United States and was impressed with the newly proclaimed Yellowstone National Park. On returning home, he started his campaign to achieve National Park status for the McPherson Range. He wrote letters recommending that the more wild and spectacular parts of the Range be preserved. He continued to explore the Range and made



many trips in the area, walking through trackless rainforest, rock-hopping along creeks and immersing himself in the area's ambience and mystery. Later, he arranged for John Buchanan to cut a riding track along the plateau to Point Lookout, where visitors could enjoy the magnificent view from this 3,500 foot peak. This track was extended along the ridge to the area where O'Reilly's now stands. To promote his cause, he invited the Queensland Governor, Lord Lamington, to visit the plateau - every version of this visit notes that the Governor marked the occasion by shooting a koala!

Collins entered the Queensland Parliament in 1896 and, due to his support, an Act for the Preservation, Management and Protection of State Forests and National Parks was passed in 1906. This was a personal victory for Collins and a milestone for conservation in the State. When he died in 1913, the battle was taken up by Romeo Watkins Lahey (pictured left below - NPAQ Archive).



Lahey worked tirelessly, door knocking and launching petitions

and breaking down resistance to the 'locking away' of this area. 100 years ago, with open land plentiful, it was hard to foresee a time when development would threaten every aspect of the southeast corner of the State. Without the dedicated work of these two men, all the valuable timber would have been stripped from the plateau and the land turned into farms.

Lamington NP is divided into two areas. The north has well developed walks and facilities, while the southern area is maintained as wilderness. Lamington is known for its natural beauty, rainforests, birdlife, ancient trees, waterfalls, walking paths and wonderful views. The park's lush rainforests include one of the largest upland subtropical rainforest remnants in the world, and the most northern Antarctic beech cool temperate rainforests in Australia. The roots of the oldest Antarctic beech trees are estimated to be over 5,000 years old.

The park is covered by more than 150 km of clearly marked walks many constructed during the Great Depression as relief work for the unemployed. The track layout was designed by Romeo Lahey who studied dairy cow movements on the surrounding hills, noticing that their paths never had a gradient of greater than 1:10. He laid out the parks tracks in a similar manner so that walkers would not be out of breath. Where steep terrain

was unavoidable, steps were used instead of a steep track. Some of these tracks are short, while others take up to a day to complete. The well maintained and signed Border Track follows the border between New South Wales and Queensland along the top of the McPherson Range. This track links Binna Burra to the O'Reilly's guesthouse at Green Mountains, a distance of some 23 kilometres and can be completed one way in seven to eight hours. A number of other well-marked and varied walks connect with this Border Track, creating a network which can be easily negotiated by relatively inexperienced bushwalkers. These include the Box Forest Circuit (10.9km or 4hrs return), Toolona Creek Circuit (17.4km or 6hrs return), and the Albert River Circuit (20.6km or 7 hours return) - to name some of the best known. While the Border Track remains reasonably level for most of its length, many of the other tracks descend to lower elevations of 750 metres or less and provide access to some of the diverse variety of flora, fauna and geography to be found in the park.

Another attraction is the Tree Top Walk, suspended 15 metres above the ground. This provides the opportunity to walk safely through the canopy of the forest along a series of suspension bridges. Climbing a ladder up a strangler fig takes visitors to an observation deck 30 metres above the ground.

FEATURED WALK

Baroon Pocket to Kondalilla Falls

Athol Lester, NPAQ Activities Convenor



Baroon Pocket to Kondalilla Falls Section – part of the popular Sunshine Coast Great Walk

Distance: 12km

Altitude Difference: 300m rise from Baroon Pocket to Kondalilla Falls Car Park.

Suitable for fit walkers, families with teenagers.

Description assumes a start at Baroon Pocket Dam (southern entry point).

This section of the Sunshine Coast Great Walk is one of the harder parts of this Great Walk, and takes in the rainforests of the deeper valleys and the beauty of Kondalilla National Park.

The track commences at a car park at the end of Narrows Road, Montville and leads past Baroon Lookout down a steep slope to the banks of Obi Obi Creek. The natural surface track crosses many feeder gullies as it runs along the Obi to the junction with Skene Creek. From here it is a steady climb past Kondalilla Falls to the car park at Kondalilla Falls Road. As part of the Sunshine Coast Great Walk, the track is well marked with frequent distance markers and well signed. Keep to the track and there will not be any issues with navigation. As at any time when venturing into bushland it

is advisable to carry a topographic map. An excellent map of this Great Walk is available from the Information Centres at Maleny, Montville and Mapleton.

After leaving the car park, at around 300 m from the start, there is a short side track which takes you down to the edge of Obi Obi Creek. Up until the around 1850, this was an important meeting place for the local Aboriginal Tribes who came regularly for a festival to enjoy the Bunya nuts which are plentiful here. If you are walking in February, you will likely see the large cones from the Bunya Pines (*Araucaria bidwillii*) which usually break open as they fall to reveal the edible nut inside.

The second diversion is approximately 1.1km from the start and again takes you down to Obi Obi Creek and a view of the “Narrows”. This section of the gorge where the creek cuts its way through the steep sided gully is very picturesque and well worth the detour. One of the many small feeder gullies also joins the main creek line here and ends with a waterfall cascading over a rocky platform. Take care not to slip on the wet rock.

A further 1.1km through a gently rising terrain brings you to the Baroon Lookout. This high point gives excellent views up and down the Obi Obi Gorge and to the magnificent rainforest borders. For



Walkers at Baroon Lookout (Athol Lester)



inexperienced walkers this is a good place to turn around and return to the carpark. From Baroon Lookout the Grade 4 track takes a steep descent to follow the creek line through heavy rainforest and some open eucalypt areas for around 5 km to the intersection of Skene Creek and Obi Obi Creek. At this point there is a good picnic spot called "Flat Rock". Through this section there is a good variety of plants from spectacular Christmas Orchids (*Calanthe triplicata* - pictured above by the author) and Walking Stick Palms (*Linospadix monostachya*) to very tall Piccabeen Palms (*Archontophoenix cunninghamiana*), Hoop Pines (*Araucaria cunninghamii*), Bunya Pines (*Araucaria bidwillii*) and Strangler Figs (*Ficus* sp.).

The birdlife is plentiful with many local

pigeons, doves, whip birds, cat birds as well as wrens and raptors. There are plenty of small frogs in the creek line including the Stoney-creek Frog (*Litoria wilcoxii*).

From "Flat Rock" the grade of the climb increases following Skene Creek to the intersection with the Kondalilla Circuit. Following to the left takes you to the base of Kondalilla Falls and then up the steep climb on the western side where there are spectacular views of the falls. An excellent viewing area gives walkers a chance to have a spell on this climb before the final push to the top of the falls. Turning to the right at the circuit intersection takes you more directly to the top of Kondalilla Falls where you will rejoin the main track.

The waterhole at the top of the Falls is an ideal swimming spot on a warm day. For most active walkers this spot can be reached after around 4 hours walking making it an ideal target for an extended lunch break.

After leaving Kondalilla Falls, it is a further steep climb of about 1.5 km to the Kondalilla Falls Picnic area and Car Park. As you level off at the top of the staired section, the path splits again. Taking the path to the left leads to a wonderful lookout with views down the lower Obi Obi Gorge toward Kennilworth.

With a car shuttle this walk is easily accomplished in a day. For a more extensive walk in the area, consider

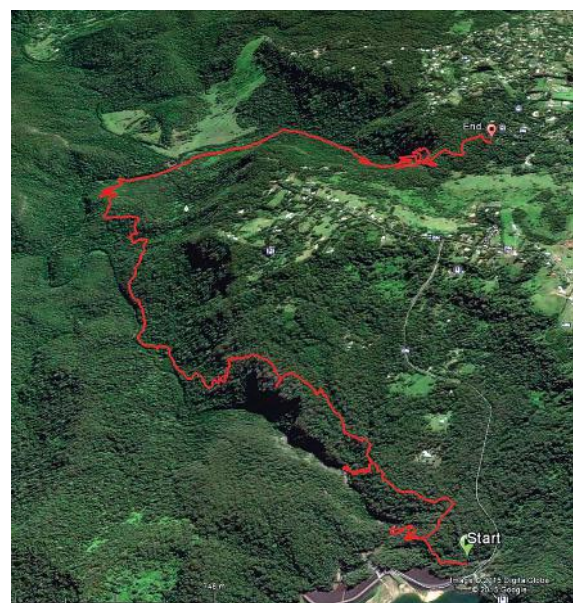
completing all 58km of the Sunshine Coast Hinterland Great Walk over four days. The Montville area is renowned for its great selection of accommodation and restaurants. A number of the accommodation venues will provide a drop off and pick up service for walkers undertaking sections of the Great Walk.

Our national parks are treasures to be preserved for future generations – leave just footprints and take only memories.

References

Map: Queensland Great Walks – Sunshine Coast Great Walk

More Information: <http://www.npsr.qld.gov.au/parks/great-walks-sunshine-coast/>



Baroon Pocket to Kondalilla Falls overlaid on aerial view (Athol Lester)

WILDLIFE FEATURE

Black-throated finch

Jeannie Rice, NPAQ Staff



The southern subspecies of the Black-throated finch (*Poephila cincta cincta*) is listed as Endangered under National, Qld and NSW laws.

It is a little bird, approx. 10cm long, weighs about 15g, has plumage in shades of brown, a grey head and a distinct black throat. Their habitat is open grassy woodland and forest, usually dominated by Eucalyptus, Corymbia and Melaleuca, and where there is access to seeding grasses and fresh water. They need a variety of grasses to feed on through the wet and dry seasons.

The main threat to the Black-throated finch is loss of suitable habitat, caused by cattle grazing, invasion by exotic weeds and grasses, drought, and land clearing for development and mining. They are also at risk of predation from feral cats, and collecting for aviculture.

The range of the Black-throated finch appears to have declined by 80% since the mid-1970s. Birds were previously found from central-eastern Queensland from Cairns, down to the Inverell area in north-east NSW. There are now only scattered populations in central-eastern Qld, confined to fragments of suitable habitat – just north of Townsville, south down to Burdekin River, and inland as far as Aramac. They are thought to be extinct in NSW. As far as we are aware, the Black-throated

finch is not currently found in any protected area in Qld.

In September 2013, the largest known population of Black-throated finches was found at a site called Ten Mile Bore, on the Moray Downs property in the Galilee basin. Moray Downs is the site of the proposed Carmichael coal mine (west of Mackay), one of many coal mines proposed for the area.

The proposed coal mines for the Galilee basin are likely to destroy large areas of suitable habitat for the Black-throated finch. Relocation is not an option for the Black-throated finch. With most of our unique wildlife, the reason they have survived where they are, is because they have just the right balance of food, water and habitat that they require.

The continued expansion of our population, and the potential money to be made by State and Federal Governments by digging our resources up and shipping them overseas, means that we need to be conserving what habitat we can now, before such species disappear.

As most readers would be aware, NPAQ has been advocating for the 12 National Reserve System (NRS) properties to be included in the national park estate. These properties were acquired between 2010 and 2012, but are yet to become national parks. All it will take is a simple act of parliament.

NPAQ's most recent appeal "Saving the last of the last" aimed at raising funds to enable surveys on four of these NRS properties, to provide further evidence that these properties should be converted to national parks. With your support, NPAQ raised enough to survey one of these properties, "The Canyon", near Einasleigh (north-west of Townsville).

While there have been confirmed sightings of Black-throated finches on land adjacent to The Canyon, it is hoped that this survey work will prove the existence of the Black-throated finches, and many other threatened species on this future national park. With the expansion of coal mining in the Galilee basin, and the continued erosion of Black-throated finch habitat in other locations, perhaps The Canyon will become one of the last refuges for this lovely little bird.



Black-throated Finch at (Ross Smith)

THE NATIONAL PARK EXPERIENCE

why national parks should be valued, told through the lens of personal experience in Queensland national parks

Martin Taylor

My Dad, Jack Taylor subscribed to the NPAQ newsletter and I credit him with giving me my love of the bush and of National Parks. As kids it seemed we were always out in a park somewhere - Mt Glorious, Mt Barney, Mt Lindsay, Lamington, Tamborine, Moreton Island. We would holiday at Coolool every summer, and always walk around Noosa Heads, Mt Peregian, and Mt Coolool. On the way up on the old road, we would always stop for tea at what is now Mooloolah River National Park before the Caloundra Turnoff, what was Beerwah State Forest back then.

When I went to uni, I was forever camping and bushwalking in national parks, but going further than I had when a kid - Mt Barney, Lost World, Main Range, Sundown, Carnarvon, the Great Barrier Reef and Bartle Frere. With a mate I drove into Harry's Hut in my ancient FJ Holden, we swam the Noosa river and then "walked" right across the big swamp to the Cooloolah sand-patch. The world seemed so much bigger then, inexhaustible. Wilderness seemed to go on forever. In the bush there were always snakes, possums, wallabies, gliders, koalas and endless new birds to see. Up above the Coomera Falls I would always run into the beautiful cream and blue Lamington crayfish hiding in the crystal cold pools among the rocks.

The damming of Lake Pedder rudely awoke me to the sad fact that I

couldn't take that for granted. That beautiful quiet wild places could and would be cleared for cattle pastures, housing estates and freeways. That wild Australian native animals and plants could and would go extinct if their habitats were not protected. As I look on the list of threatened species, there is the poignant proof of that. *Galaxias pedderensis* a Lake Pedder endemic now no longer found in the flooded lake that give it its name, and only found now in two translocated populations. Later I would learn about species saved by parks I had never visited. The northern hairy nosed wombat whose last refuge of only about 30 individuals was saved in Epping Forest National Park Scientific. The bridled nail-tail wallaby, whose last refuge of was saved in Taunton National Park Scientific.

The last 10 years has seen major change. A ban on land clearing come into force in Queensland in 2006 - an historic achievement. The growth of parks had picked up in Queensland under the Goss and Beattie governments, but was still nowhere near enough to compensate for the roar of hundreds of bulldozers. In 2008 we saw the Bligh government commitment to grow parks to 20 million hectares by 2020, close on the heels of the historic \$180million National Reserve System grants program announced by then Minister Garrett. The properties purchased by Queensland with this

money are still sitting there awaiting gazettal - over 600,000 hectares. Perhaps soon we will see them escape the limbo they have been in for the last few years.

Once I looked out at the mountains of the scenic rim. I thought that was what Parks were about. Now I look out and ask why so little? Surely as Harvey Locke challenges us, nature needs (at least) half?

How is it that more than half of threatened species have inadequate habitat protected in Qld, and 13% have none at all? How is it that Queensland National Parks have staggered and lurched to 5% of land area, with the 2020 biodiversity convention target now at 17%?

We know that former Minister Andrew Powell kept the acquisition budget alive and was still adding more land, but none of it is yet gazetted, and the flow of state forests and leasehold land into the parks estate was cut off. 2.8 million hectares of state forest went back to the loggers.

With a new government taking its seat at the table of power, can we expect this parlous situation to turn around? Yes. But only if the community demands it. The goodwill is there. Poll after poll shows very high community support for national parks. But that goodwill has to be focussed and harnessed.

Martin Taylor is the protected areas scientist with WWF-Australia. Martin was previously Executive Officer for NPAQ. In the US, Martin was Conservation Scientist with the Centre for Biological Diversity, and also a consulting scientist for the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society.

WHAT'S ON

EVENTS

27-29 March

National Parks Day Weekend

DETAILS: Join with NPAQ, and our hosts, the Green Mountains Natural History Association (GMNHA), as we celebrate National Parks Day and the 100th anniversary of the gazettal of Lamington National Park.

On Friday 27 March, arrive at your campsite/accommodation to settle in and take the opportunity for a short walk of your own choosing. At 6.15pm there will be a buffet style dinner served in the Pavilion at O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat.

Following dinner, there will be a short talk by Warren Smith of GMNHA to introduce Charles Chauvel, his films, and their place in Australian Motion Picture History. This will be followed by a showing of "Sons of Matthew" filmed in 1948, much of it around Lamington National Park. There will also be a small display of still photographs, books, and other materials about his films.

On Saturday 28 March there will be the Naturalist Cairn and Foresters Camp walk led by Ann Tracey and Robin Buckley (easy, 15km), the Toolona Circuit walk led by Mary Comer (intermediate, 18.4km), and the Albert River Circuit walk led by Tony Parsons (intermediate, 21km). The day will end with another buffet style dinner at O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat (at 6.15pm).

Following dinner, Peter Ogilvie (NPAQ Councillor and Ex-Director with Qld Parks and Wildlife Service) will talk about the formation and development of Lamington National Park.

In the morning of Sunday 29 March, there will be the opportunity to take in the short walks around the immediate vicinity at Green Mountains before returning home.

Please organise and pay for your own accommodation at the National Parks Day Weekend.

NPAQ and Green Mountains NHA recommends the tent and campervan sites at Green Mountains Campground (at entrance to Lamington National Park), O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat, Luke O'Reilly's Farm, Cainbale Mountain Lodge, Canungra Showgrounds, and Sharp Park.

CONTACT: www.npaq.org.au/events or call 07 3367 0878

COST: \$35/person per buffet dinner

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22 April

Social and topics of interest evening with:

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and DEHP Landscape Conservation Unit

DETAILS: Senior representative/s from the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services (QPWS) and the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (DEHP) will discuss National Park acquisitions and management directions.

Come and hear about the future of national parks in Queensland!

NPAQ will also be celebrating its 85th birthday on this evening. The QPWS/DEHP talk will run from 7.45pm until approximately 9pm at the Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens auditorium (just below the Qld Herbarium at the botanic gardens).

Following the presentation, supper will be served and there will be plenty of time for you to mingle with the QPWS and DEHP reps!

Bookings are not required for this event.

CONTACT: www.npaq.org.au/events or call 07 3367 0878

COST: Free

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Other Events

21-29 March

Connect to Your Creek events

CONTACT: www.healthywaterways.org or 07 3177 9100

26 March

Southeast Queensland Fire and Biodiversity forum

DETAILS: A panel of speakers will discuss issues relating to the impact and management of fire on Moreton Bay islands including species such as Swamp orchids (pictured - Paul Donatiu).



CONTACT: www.fireandbiodiversity.org.au or 07 3503 1415

20 April

The Wonderful World of Bryophytes seminar

CONTACT: www.qnc.org.au or 07 3843 2998

2 May

Exploring Apparent Conflicts in Wildlife Management forum

CONTACT: www.theca.asn.au or 07 3878 5088

31 May

Green Heart Fair

CONTACT: www.citysmart.com.au/greenheartfair or 07 3007 7000

Vale

Our sincere condolences to the family of Neil Walker; Neil passed away in December 2014. Neil was a long term member and took part in many NPAQ activities.

Calendar Dates

28 March

Earth Hour

CONTACT: www.earthhour.org.au

28 March

National Parks Day

DETAILS: The anniversary of the first national park gazettal in Queensland.

CONTACT: www.npaq.org.au/events

15 April

NPAQs 85th Birthday

CONTACT: www.npaq.org.au/events

22 April

Earth Day

CONTACT: www.earthday.org



Special thanks

Summer Raffle sponsor

NPAQ wishes to thank O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat for donating two night's accommodation in a mountain view room. The prize was raffled over the summer and funds raised will help support the Association's work.

Congratulations to the winner of the prize, Jenna Huckenswager.



ESCAPE • EXPERIENCE • CONNECT

Letter to the Editor

January's members meeting gave us the chance to discuss whether adoption of the cardinal principle in legislation was unique to Queensland. Councillor, Peter Ogilvie, said it seemed to be so.

In 1865, Frederick Olmsted, father of landscape architecture in the U.S., was a commissioner required by Congress to report on how Yosemite National Park might be managed. He wrote, "The main duty with which the Commissioners should be charged should be to give every advantage practicable to the mass of the people to benefit by that which is peculiar to this ground and which has caused Congress to treat it differently from other parts of the public domain. This peculiarity consists wholly in its natural scenery. The first point to be kept in mind then is the preservation and maintenance as exactly as is possible of the natural scenery; the restriction, that is to say, within the narrowest limits consistent with the necessary accommodations of visitors, of all artificial constructions and the prevention of all constructions markedly inharmonious with the scenery or which would unnecessarily obscure, distort or detract from the dignity of the scenery."

Given the style and tone of mid 19th century writing, this must be the basis of the similarly worded cardinal principle, recognised for the first time in Queensland in the Forestry Act 1959 almost a century later. Section 17 subsection 1(a) of the Nature Conservation Act 1992 states, "A national park is to be managed to provide, to the greatest possible extent, for the permanent preservation of the area's natural condition and the protection of the area's cultural resources."

NPAQ is seeking to have the current legislation amended to remove qualifications that override this cardinal principle. I recommend reading Olmsted's report, chapter 1 of the U.S. National Park Service history, available online, for a sincere discussion about park management.

Don Marshall, NPAQ member

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SUBSCRIBE to NPAQ**



www.npaq.org.au



O'Reilly's

RAINFOREST RETREAT

