

protected

Magazine of National Parks Association of Queensland

a focus on preserving national parks

STRIKING A BALANCE: NATURE-BASED MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTIONS

PLUS

Transitioning Native State Forests
into Protected Areas

ALSO FEATURED

NPAQ Moments in Time
Support for National Parks, Queensland
The Opalton Grasswren
Ranger Spotlight



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Editor Samantha Smith

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(*Amytornis rowleyi*)
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FROM THE PRESIDENT



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

SHARE YOUR PHOTOS



A warm, wet (again!) autumn welcomes us. A very important and strategic opportunity is on our agenda for this year, which is the cessation of logging in SEQ's native State Forests, and their transition into Protected Areas (PAs) including National Parks.

Terminating logging in such areas is starting to occur nationally – it has already happened in WA, and it will cease in Victoria at the end of this year.

This presents an unprecedented chance to substantially increase the area and ecosystems represented in our PAs, especially in regions such as SEQ, where acquiring significant parcels of land is a real challenge.

The scale of this opportunity is substantial, with around 20,000 ha in SEQ to be transitioned by the end of 2024, and a further 60,000 ha in adjoining regions (e.g. eastern hardwoods) over the next few years. I have called this a 'once in a generation' opportunity.

I attended the launch of Prof David Lindenmayer's book *The Forest Wars* two weeks ago, and I can highly recommend it as a very credible, well-referenced book written in an easily readable style.

It debunks 37 myths of logging in native forests purported by the

forestry industry. Four of these myths that resonated with me, and that reveal what the evidence indicates is really occurring, are:

Logging is good business: State governments annually pay hundreds of millions of dollars in subsidies to this industry. Without these, many forestry operations would be insolvent.

We need native logging to build and furnish our houses: In 2022, 90% of native forest logging went to make woodchips or paper – mainly for export.

Native forestry employs thousands of people: Relatively few people are employed, especially when compared to other sectors (agriculture, tourism, services) in regional areas where logging occurs.

Selective logging is better than clear-felling: Logging changes the forest structure. Many species do not grow back, removing habitat for some critical species. It therefore alters the biodiversity of the logged coupe.

David Lindenmayer is an acclaimed international expert in forest and woodland logging and biodiversity conservation, with more than 40 years of research experience in this field.

He is worth paying attention to, especially given the relevance of this issue to SEQ and adjacent regions.

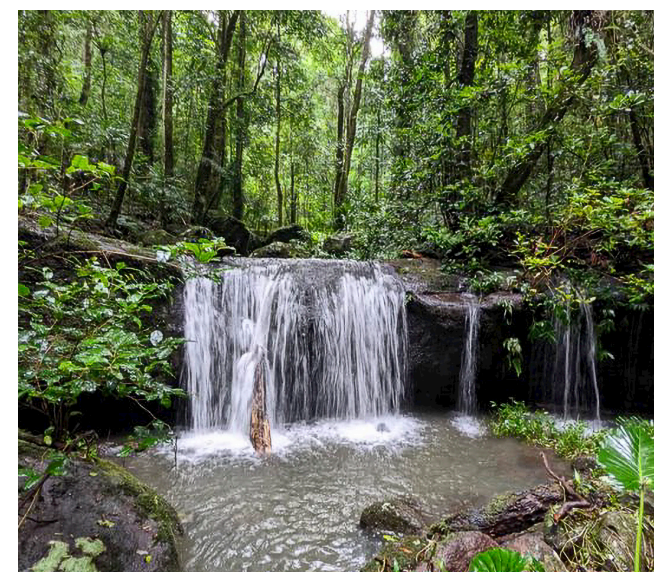
Time moves on, and issues evolve to generate fundamental shifts in community attitudes and preferences.

An article outlining the key messages from the book is in this issue of *Protected* – I highly recommend reading it. It's a book for our times.

Susanne Cooper
President, NPAQ



Photo Banner: Beerwah Forest – NPAQ archives
Photo Inline: logged trees, Kuranda – © Beth Baisch/Dreamstime.com



Waterfall in a QLD National Park
(@Davehikes - Instagram)



Eastern grey kangaroo on Minjerribah, Naree Budjong
Djara National Park (Karin Cox)



Whitehaven Beach, Whitsundays National Park
(Samantha Smith)

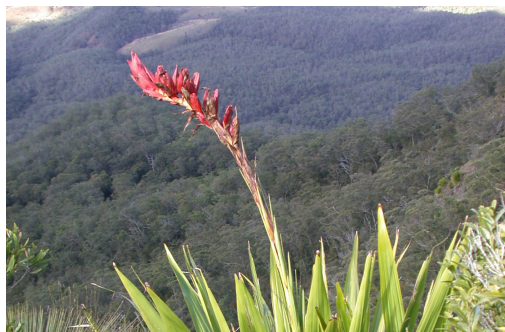


Cedar Creek, Tamborine National Park
(Chris Thomas)

STRIKING A BALANCE: NATURE-BASED MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTIONS

– The Editor

The following was written based on an article in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health ('Tourism as a Tool in Nature-Based Mental Health: Progress and Prospects Post-Pandemic'), published in 2022 and written by Buckley, Ralf C, and Cooper, Mary-Ann.
<http://hdl.handle.net/10072/421534>



The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the global need for mental health care. Amidst the turmoil, the fusion of nature-based tourism and mental wellness emerged as a promising avenue for recovery. This article navigates the evolving landscape of nature-based mental health interventions, emphasising the importance of preserving biodiversity and undertaking conservation efforts.

Introduction

Tourism has long served as a conduit for enhancing well-being, offering solace and communion with the natural world. Against the pandemic's backdrop, the value of these experiences surged, with nature tourism playing a pivotal role in mental health recovery.

Here, we explore the intersection of tourism and mental health, while being mindful of the imperative to safeguard conservation and biodiversity.

The Role of Nature Tourism in Mental Health

Nature tourism holds vast potential for promoting mental wellness, providing individuals with opportunities to immerse themselves in therapeutic natural environments. National parks, in particular, stand as bastions of biodiversity and serenity, offering respite from the frenetic pace of modern life. However, it is crucial that tourism operators ensure that access to these sanctuaries does not compromise their primary purpose of conservation.

Global Perspectives on Nature-Based Mental Health

Countries worldwide are awakening to the intrinsic connection between nature and mental well-being, integrating nature-based interventions into mental health care frameworks.

From Australia to Chile, initiatives aimed at harmonising with nature and increasing physical and mental wellness have gained momentum, signalling a paradigm shift in mental health approaches. Yet, the challenge lies in balancing accessibility for human health initiatives with conservation imperatives.

Addressing Key Research Questions

As the field of nature-based mental health advances, critical research questions demand attention. These include evaluating the efficacy of guided nature experiences versus self-guided visits, understanding the impact of biodiversity on therapeutic outcomes, and discerning sustainable practices for promoting mental wellness without compromising conservation goals.

Challenges and Opportunities

While strides have been made in leveraging nature tourism for mental health promotion, challenges persist at both individual and systemic levels.

Access barriers, financial constraints, and cultural considerations pose formidable hurdles to equitable nature-based interventions. Yet, within these challenges lie opportunities for innovation and collaboration, fostering a balance between mental wellness and necessary conservation outcomes.

Balancing Conservation and Mental Health

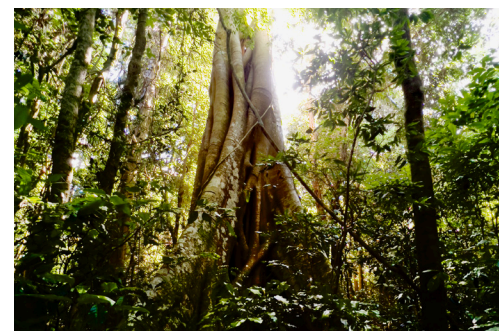
While the benefits of nature-based tourism on mental health are evident, it's essential to acknowledge and address concerns about its potential impact on the environment,

particularly in protected areas like national parks.

Increased visitation to these pristine habitats poses significant challenges for conservation efforts and ecological sustainability.

One of the primary concerns associated with tourism in national parks is the potential degradation of fragile ecosystems.

The influx of visitors can lead to habitat destruction, disturbance of wildlife, and disruption of natural processes. Additionally, the construction of infrastructure to accommodate tourists—such as trails, visitor centers, and accommodations—may further encroach upon pristine wilderness areas, altering ecological integrity.



Mitigating Tourism Impacts

To mitigate these risks, tourism operators must work within the guides set forth by conservation organisations and government to implement sustainable practices. This includes setting carrying

capacities for visitor numbers, implementing strict guidelines for visitor behaviour, and investing in infrastructure that minimises environmental impact.

Additionally, education and awareness campaigns can help foster a culture of environmental stewardship among visitors, encouraging them to respect and protect the natural world.

Community Engagement and Indigenous Knowledge

Furthermore, recognising the importance of Indigenous communities and traditional landowners in conservation efforts is essential.

Indigenous knowledge systems offer invaluable insights into sustainable resource management and biodiversity conservation. By involving local communities in decision-making processes and respecting their rights to land and resources, we can ensure that conservation efforts are inclusive, equitable, and culturally sensitive.

Conclusion

The convergence of nature-based tourism and mental wellness holds immense potential for enhancing human well-being. However, this potential must be approached with a steadfast commitment to conservation principles.

Achieving a balance between promoting mental health and preserving biodiversity is crucial to forging a path towards a more sustainable and harmonious future for both people and the planet. This entails implementing strategies that prioritise both the therapeutic benefits of nature-based experiences and the protection of natural ecosystems.

Nature-based tourism emerges as a beacon of hope, offering individuals avenues for healing and resilience amidst tumultuous times. By embracing and promoting nature-based interventions, we not only support mental wellness but also contribute to the preservation of ecological integrity.

Through preserving the sanctity of natural habitats while also promoting mental wellness, we can pave the way for a future where both human well-being and conservation are paramount, ensuring a legacy of sustainability for generations to come.

Photo Banner: St Helena Island NP – Karin Cox
Photo Inline (left): Spear Lily (*Doryanthes palmeri*) – Paul Donatui
Photo Inline (right): D'Aguilar NP – Karin Cox

TRANSITIONING NATIVE STATE FORESTS INTO PROTECTED AREAS

– Chris Thomas

In 1999, the *South East Queensland Forest Agreement* was signed by the Beattie Government, various conservation groups and the then Queensland Timber Board.

Under this historic agreement, it was agreed that remaining areas of native state forests between Gladstone in the north to the New South Wales border in the south would only be logged as a last resort and their protection would be secured at the end of 2024 “by the latest”.

In 2019, then Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk extended this deadline until 2026 for State Forests north of Noosa.

Transitioning native state forests into various protected area tenures requires a nuanced approach, respecting their conservation values, the legacy of forestry and a range of existing community uses. It also requires leadership to ensure that the transitions occur in an orderly and timely manner. A key issue threatening the timely transition of native state forests in Queensland is lobbying and campaigning by the Timber Industry.

Professor David Lindenmayer is a world-leading expert in forest ecology and resource management, conservation science and biodiversity conservation

and has been leading the charge in response to lobbying by the Timber Industry.

Central to Lindenmayer’s vision is a new approach to native forestry management—one rooted in reverence for the natural world and guided by scientific rigour. By exposing the truth behind industry spin and misinformation, Lindenmayer lays the foundation for a more sustainable future—one where native forests thrive undisturbed and communities coexist in harmony with nature.

The following opinion piece, published in *Crikey* on 5 April 2024, was authored by David Lindenmayer and Chris Taylor, both from the Fenner School of Environment and Society at ANU. The article debunks one of the main myths espoused by the Timber Industry, being the merits of forest thinning.

No, thinning forests isn’t the answer – it worsens our wildfires.
It might seem like forest thinning is a good way to reduce the risk of bushfires. Empirical evidence shows otherwise.

In the world game—football (or soccer)—an own goal is when a player accidentally scores against their team. But own goals are not confined to the football pitch.

Evidence-free policy and management threaten to kick a slew of own goals, via demands to intensively thin native forests. Thinning is where more than half of a forest’s trees are removed in some cases, leaving fewer, more widely spaced stems in what then often becomes a radically altered forest.

Thinning is done by heavy machinery, with the timber typically used for firewood, woodchips or making paper. Because thinning demands such machinery, an extensive, expensive road network is needed. This means it costs money to thin forests, and the government bodies responsible for forest management make losses.

Recent popular books and commentaries have called for the widespread thinning of national parks and state forests. Forestry industry lobby groups also routinely call for forest thinning, especially after wildfires such as the Black Summer of 2019–20.

The logic of such calls is that thinning reduces the risk of wildfires. Yet empirical evidence shows it either has no effect on the severity of wildfires or worsens them in some cases. One study found that thinning operations significantly increased the fuel hazard by adding 24 tonnes per hectare of fuel to the forest floor. This can increase the severity of wildfires, not only endangering the integrity of the

forest itself but also putting nearby communities at increased fire risk.

Thinned forests also allow more sunlight through sparser forest canopy, drying out fuel and permitting more wind to blow across it, thereby driving the more rapid spread of a potential fire. Even the government’s forestry guidelines warn of the increased fire dangers posed by thinning.

Further, removing large numbers of trees from forests generates significant amounts of greenhouse gas emissions (up to hundreds of tonnes per hectare), not only during logging operations but also because the trees are used for firewood, woodchips (for export) or for making paper or box liners. These forest products have a short time in the carbon life cycle before they go to landfill and generate yet further emissions.

It is critical to understand that trees are mostly carbon, so thinning forests and turning timber into short-life products liberates much of that carbon to the atmosphere. Importantly, there is a long delay of hundreds if not thousands of years between when carbon emissions from logging first occur and when that carbon is fixed by trees. The more carbon that stays in the atmosphere for longer, the more potent global heating is and the higher the temperatures that result.

Beyond this, thinning forests also impacts biodiversity. A vast number of animal and plant species are strongly dependent on the understorey and other plants that can be lost or badly damaged during industrial thinning operations. It is a critical part of the habitat that is home to critically endangered species such as Victoria’s faunal emblem, the Leadbeater’s possum. These animals cannot exist when their habitat is removed. In fact, the more layers of forest that exist, the more species of birds and other animals that can coexist.

The best climate solution for forests is to leave them intact and not log or thin them at all. Forests need to recover from decades of overlogging and gross mismanagement by industry and logging agencies. They need less disturbance, not more. Indeed, other key work indicates that if we were to stop logging native forests in Australia, we would reach our 43% GHG [green house gas] reduction targets by 2030 (and have some margin left over to offset some of our other emissions like those from the transport sector).

The overwhelming conclusion of the body of scientific work done on fire risk, carbon emissions and biodiversity conservation is that thinning forests is a bad idea. Making sure we do not have widespread thinning in forests is a critical way

to reduce the risks of yet more evidence-free forest policy management own goals.

An interview with David Lindenmayer discussing more of the myths espoused by the timber industry is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfWxbJXeZbE&ab_channel=ANUTV

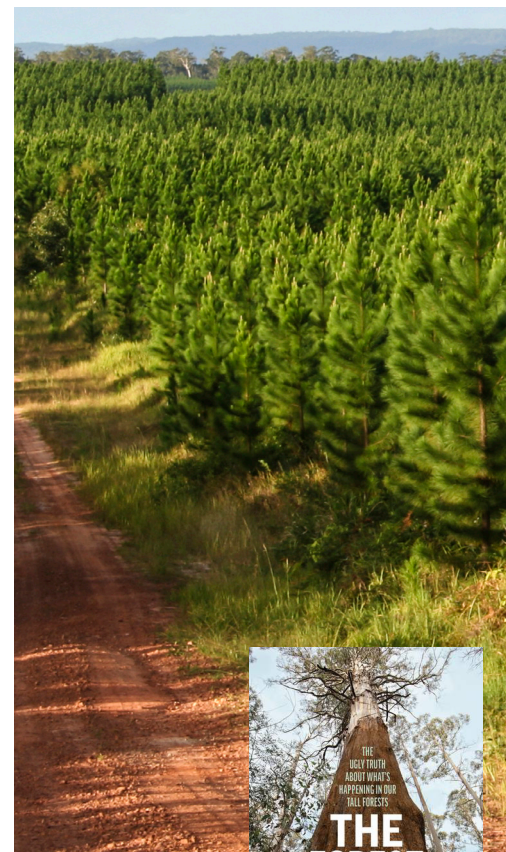


Photo Banner:
Beerburum State
Forest – Martin
Valigursky/Dreamstime

Photo Inline (above
left): Pine plantation – Flowertime/Dreamstime.
Photo Inset (above right): *The Forest Wars* cover –
Allen & Unwin

EXPLORING VISITOR OFF-TRAIL BEHAVIOUR NPAQ ACTIVITIES UPDATE

– The Editor

– Mary Anne Ryan

The following article is grounded in the research conducted by Edmund Goh, as outlined in his paper titled 'Walking Off-Trail in National Parks: Monkey See Monkey Do'. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01490400.2002.0.1755750>

National parks hold a special place in the hearts of outdoor enthusiasts and nature lovers worldwide. These protected areas offer sanctuary to diverse ecosystems, serving as havens for wildlife and playgrounds for adventurers seeking solace in the great outdoors. Yet, amid the breathtaking landscapes and pristine beauty, a concerning issue persists—visitor off-trail behaviour.

The allure of wandering off the beaten path often proves irresistible to park visitors, despite warnings and regulations urging them to stay on designated trails. This behaviour not only poses risks to individual safety but also threatens delicate ecosystems, trampling vegetation and disrupting habitats. To better understand the factors driving off-trail behaviour, researchers have turned to behavioural theories, particularly the *theory of planned behaviour* (TPB).

In a recent study, scholars extended the TPB framework to explore the pro-environmental construct in predicting visitor off-trail intentions at national parks. Through quantitative questionnaire items developed from an elicitation study, researchers examined the interplay of behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs, control beliefs, and pro-environmental values among 325 respondents.

The findings of the study revealed intriguing insights into the psychology behind visitor off-trail behaviour. Behavioural beliefs emerged as the strongest predictor of off-trail intentions, with visitors harboring the belief that straying from designated paths would lead to a shorter route. Normative beliefs also played a significant role, particularly the influence of friends as a reference group encouraging off-trail exploration.



However, control beliefs and pro-environmental values exhibited weaker predictive power, suggesting that visitors may perceive walking off-trail as easy and inconsequential in terms of environmental impact. Despite possessing strong pro-environmental values, visitors did not necessarily equate off-trail behaviour with ecological harm, highlighting a disconnect between values and behaviour in this context.

While the study confirmed the efficacy of the TPB model in elucidating visitor behavioural intentions, it also underscored the limitations of relying solely on attitudinal factors and pro-environmental values to predict off-trail behaviour. This nuanced understanding paves the

way for more targeted interventions and management strategies aimed at curbing noncompliant behaviour in national parks.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to the refinement of the TPB framework by incorporating pro-environmental values and shedding light on their limited predictive power in specific behavioural contexts. This nuanced understanding of visitor motivations can inform the development of more-effective management strategies tailored to the unique challenges posed by off-trail behaviour.

Practically, park authorities can leverage these insights to implement a combination of direct management techniques and social marketing initiatives to discourage off-trail walking. Zoning orders, physical barriers, fines, and penalties can be employed to enforce compliance, while persuasive messaging targeting attitudes and social norms can promote responsible behaviour among visitors.

Ultimately, fostering a culture of environmental stewardship and responsible recreation is paramount in preserving the natural splendour of national parks for future generations. By understanding the underlying factors driving off-trail behaviour, park authorities and researchers can work together to strike a delicate balance between conservation and visitor enjoyment, ensuring these cherished landscapes remain unspoiled for years to come.

Photo Banner: Springbrook NP – Kirsty Leckie

Photo Inline (center): Springbrook NP – Unknown

National Parks Association of Queensland's Activities Committee is almost as old as the organisation itself. The objective of this group, as reported in The Activities Guidelines, is "to offer a wide variety of interesting and stimulating experiences to showcase the wonderful diversity and heritage that we have in our National Parks in Queensland and beyond. We hope to kindle a love of the environment and an appreciation for the natural world in those who are new to the outdoors, and to support more experienced participants in their ongoing love and appreciation of the protected areas within this state".

One of the most important and longstanding NPAQ activities has revolved around removing lantana and weeds from the Jollys Lookout section of D'Aguilar National Park. This project, initiated in 1968 with the support of QPWS, has been managed by NPAQ since 1990.

The success of this endeavour was acknowledged in 1995, with the National Trust awarding the John Herbert Award for Excellence in Heritage Conservation Works or Action to this group. A walk along the track from Jollys Lookout to Boombana shows the rugged off-track terrain, indicating the passion and commitment of workers involved in this programme.

Angus McElnea, one of the members who proudly accepted this award, continues to be involved with the Vegetation Management Group.

Birdwatching in and around the Brisbane area attracts a passionate group of members who gather monthly to record and discuss their avifauna observations. Their sightings are recorded on an eBird checklist, which is a worldwide checklist of bird sightings. The documentation contributes to hundreds of conservation decisions and helps inform bird research worldwide.

On 7 April, a walk is offered in an area recently purchased and developed by the Redlands City Council. Mt Cotton Eastern Escarpment Conservation Area offers a variety of vegetation and formalised tracks, some along the local creek line.

An annual camp around Easter brings members and friends together to explore the area around the base camp. This year's venue is at Queen Mary Falls Caravan Park and Cabins.

An additional camp is planned for the August/September period, situated on the banks of Storm King Dam, outside Stanthorpe. Activities offered during the week will give participants the opportunity to see the Granite Belt at its best, as the spring flowers burst into bloom.

Some of our favourite walking tracks are in Lamington and Main Range National Parks. In May, a walk is offered along heritage-listed Spicers Gap Road. Part of this walking track demonstrates the use of 19th-century engineering techniques

with the remains of a pine log surface still visible. Later in the year, at Binna Burra, a walk along the Caves and Lower Bellbird Track is planned.

South East Queensland is proud of its Rail Trails which are popular with cyclists and walkers. Recently, a return cycle trip was offered on the Caboolture to Wamuran Rail Trail—an enjoyable ride for both the passionate or casual bike rider.

The Activities Committee, although small in number, offers a variety of pursuits throughout the year. Further information about forthcoming Activities can be found on the NPAQ website under Activities and Events.

The Committee welcomes suggestions to add to the calendar.



Photo Banner: NPAQ Easter Camp 2024, Girraween NP – Supplied

Photo Inline (above): Northbrook Gorge, D'Aguilar NP – Joanne Dang

SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL PARKS, QUEENSLAND

– P. Bjurstoem, T. Dennis, J. McAuley

The following is a summary of a report submitted to Bond University by the authors as part of a collaborative research project between Bond University and NPAQ.

The below article delves into public perceptions and behaviours toward Queensland's national parks. Through a combination of qualitative interviews, observational data, and quantitative surveys, we uncovered a nuanced landscape, challenging assumptions about support levels.

Demographic profiling revealed diverse respondent bases, with geographic concentration in areas like the greater Gold Coast region.

Awareness emerged as crucial, with higher perceived awareness correlating with increased park visits and favorable perceptions.

Scenery proved to be the primary motivation for park visits, suggesting targeted promotional efforts aligned with respondent preferences. Conversely, barriers to visitation included issues like rubbish, poor mobile network connection, and long travel times, highlighting areas for improvement.

Surprisingly, a positive correlation emerged between travel time and financial contributions, suggesting a link between commitment and support.

While the study offers rich insights, limitations, such as sample size constraints and potential biases, underscore the need for future research to ensure broader generalisability.

Research Objectives

The investigation aims to uncover the reasons behind the diverse attitudes Queenslanders have toward national parks through key research objectives. These objectives include assessing the level of support for national parks, identifying supporters and non-supporters, understanding their motivations, and exploring factors that either encourage or discourage support.

Additionally, the correlation between visiting national parks and supporting them will be examined quantitatively.

Interview results

The interview questions asked aimed to gauge respondents' opinions and level of support for national parks. Participants, mostly around 31 years old, had limited knowledge of national parks, though all had heard of them and visited at least once.

Most had not explored parks outside Queensland. Surprisingly, many believed they had donated to park organisations, showing support despite limited awareness.

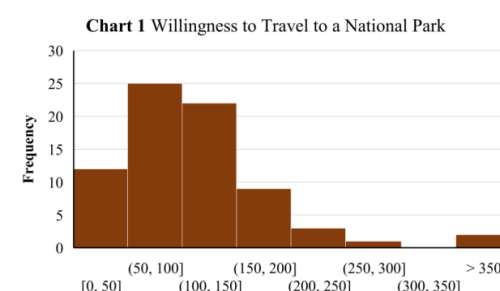
Perceptions of park popularity varied, with some viewing them as more attractive to tourists.

Strengths included natural beauty, while accessibility issues and lack of amenities were common weaknesses. Participants recommended better marketing and family-oriented activities. Safety and cleanliness were seen as priorities.

Results

What level of support/non-support is there for national parks?

Chart 1 (below) showcases Q8 of the survey and the willingness to travel to a national park. This willingness was expressed in minutes of travel time.



Here we can see a clear trend. The highest density of responses lies within the 50–100 and 100–150 minute density columns. This shows us that most respondents are willing to travel between 50 to 150 minutes to reach a national park. For a more evenly distributed graph, we did not include responses which were significantly over 350 minutes.

Chart 2 displays the results of question 14 in the form of a simple frequency diagram. Here, we can see a clear trend. Over 91% of the respondents have never made a financial donation to a national park. In addition to this simple bar chart, we attempted to correlate Q17 (Have you ever made a financial donation to a national park?) and Q7 (Number of visits made to a national park in the last year). We argued that having visited a national park might have a positive impact on the likelihood of donating.

Who are the supporters/non-supporters of national parks?

The survey revealed a balanced gender distribution, with around 47% female and 53% male respondents. Over 91% of respondents fell into the 18–28 age range, mainly students from Bond University. Despite this, the employment status was evenly distributed among respondents, indicating active employment among the young demographic.

Nearly all respondents resided in Queensland, with a concentration in the greater Gold Coast region, particularly in areas like Robina, Broadbeach, and Surfers Paradise.

Why do they support/not support national parks?

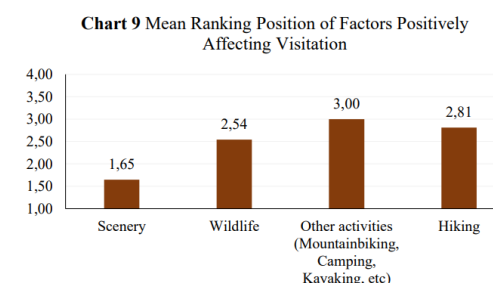
A higher perceived awareness by respondents is associated with 1)

increased park visitation and 2) a more favourable perception of parks' popularity.

What would encourage Queenslanders to support national parks?

Respondents were asked to rank four different motivations (scenery, wildlife, other activities, and hiking) in order, with position 1 being the most influential on park visits and 4 being the least influential.

The below chart shows that scenery was a very common reason for them visiting the national parks (lower mean score shows higher ranking).

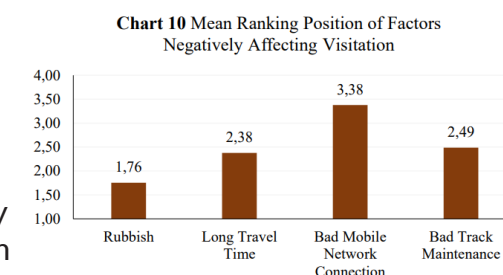


What would discourage Queenslanders from supporting national parks?

Survey participants were given the following options to rank: rubbish, long travel time, bad mobile network connection, and bad track maintenance. When analysing the bar graph (top right), it is evident that there is once again a dominant factor dissuading people from visiting national parks—rubbish (lower mean score shows higher ranking).

What correlation, if any, is there between visiting national parks and supporting national parks?

There was seen to be a potential link between the commitment of time to get to a national park and the sense of support or attachment to national parks.



One interpretation of this correlation could be that individuals who are willing to dedicate a considerable amount of time to reach a national park may possess a deeper appreciation or commitment to the conservation cause. The act of making a financial donation could be an expression of this heightened connection, viewing the investment of time and money as a holistic contribution toward the preservation of these natural spaces.

Photo Banner: Curtis Falls, Tamborine NP
– Steve Austin
Photos Inline: Data analysis visualisations – Supplied

PARK IN FOCUS

Diamantina National Park

– The Editor

Nestled in the heart of Queensland's rugged outback lies a natural wonderland waiting to be discovered: Diamantina National Park. With its vast expanses of sweeping plains, rugged gorges, and rich biodiversity, this park offers an unparalleled opportunity to immerse oneself in the raw beauty of Australia's inland wilderness.

Diamantina National Park is a landscape defined by contrasts. From the vast floodplains of the Diamantina River to the rugged ridges of the gorges, every corner of this park tells a story of resilience and adaptation. One of the park's most iconic features is the legendary Diamantina River, which cuts a meandering course through the parched earth, sustaining life in an otherwise harsh environment. Visitors can trace the river's path on scenic drives or embark on guided walks to witness the rich birdlife that thrives along its banks.

For those seeking adventure, Diamantina National Park offers a myriad of opportunities to explore its untamed wilderness. Hiking trails wind through ancient landscapes, leading intrepid travellers to hidden waterholes, breathtaking lookouts, and secluded campsites.

The park's diverse ecosystems support a wealth of wildlife, from elusive yellow-footed rock-wallabies and kangaroos to majestic wedge-tailed eagles soaring overhead. Birdwatchers will delight in the

chance to spot rare species such as the crimson chat and Bourke's parrot (below) in their natural habitat.



One of the park's most iconic landmarks is the rugged Warracoota Circuit, a challenging hiking trail that traverses the park's remote interior. This multi-day trek takes adventurers on a journey through some of the Diamantina's most spectacular scenery, from towering escarpments to ancient rock formations. Along the way, hikers can experience the thrill of camping under the stars, far from the distractions of modern life.



In addition to its natural beauty, Diamantina National Park also holds cultural significance for the

traditional owners of the land, the Maiawali people. Visitors to the park can learn about the rich Aboriginal heritage of the area through interpretive signage and guided tours, gaining a deeper understanding of the land's spiritual and cultural importance.

As Queensland's outback gem, Diamantina National Park invites visitors to reconnect with nature and embark on a journey of discovery. Whether exploring this vast wilderness on foot, camping under the star-strewn outback sky, or simply soaking in the tranquility of this ancient landscape, a visit to Diamantina NP promises an unforgettable experience at Australia's wild heart.

The recent acquisition of nearby Vergemont Station represents a significant milestone in the ongoing efforts to protect and preserve Queensland's natural heritage. By expanding Diamantina National Park's boundaries, the Queensland State government has demonstrated its commitment to conservation, ensuring that future generations will have the opportunity to experience the wonders of this unique landscape. Read more at: <https://npaq.org.au/protecting-beautiful-western-queensland/>

Photo Banner: Diamantina Channel and Coolabahs – David Elliott

Photo Inline (center top): Bourke's parrot (*Neopsephotus bourkii*) – Imogen Warren/Dreamstime.

Photo Inline (center bottom): Gidgee tree, Warracoota Circuit – David Elliott

NPAQ MOMENTS IN TIME

– NPAQ Archives

NOOSA HEADS NATIONAL PARK.
(75 MILES NORTH OF BRISBANE).

31.3.1954.

Issued by National Parks Association of Queensland, Box 281D, G.P.O., Brisbane, for the use of its members on Field Outing of 14/15th August, 1954 and on subsequent private or Association outings.

Noosa National Park was gazetted in 1930. Subsequent additions were made in 1939 following representations by this Association. The reserves total 760 acres. In recent years the Government has been considering enlarging Noosa National Park but no finality has been reached at this stage.

Graded paths have been constructed in the northern and eastern sections and old tracks exist in the southern portion. The cyclone of February 1954, caused severe damage to approach roads and the tracks but these should be repaired by the middle of the year.

This National Park reserve was created after careful consideration to preserve for Noosa residents and visitors three widely contrasting vegetations. At the southern portion of the reserve and further south is coastal wildflower or heath country. In the northern section on the heights and in the gullies are pockets of rain forest containing Hoop Pine, Piccabeen palms and Moreton Bay figs. Open eucalypt forests with Sand Cypress, Forest Oak, Scrub Box, and Bloodwoods are also found within the reserves. This "living museum" also preserves orchids, staghorns, and elkhorns in their natural state.

Within a few hundred yards of the main beach, three (3) graded tracks commence at the entrance to the National Park. One goes to the top of Noosa Hill, another plunges south through thick rain forest, "the Tanglewood" eventually joining the first track at the top of Noosa Hill (480 feet high). The third track follows the northern shore line of Noosa Headland past the Boiling Pot, Stairway, Granite Bay, and the Fairy Pool to Hells Gates.

Distance from Brisbane by co-ordinated daily Rail/Road transport 105 miles and by road 109 miles via Cooroy.

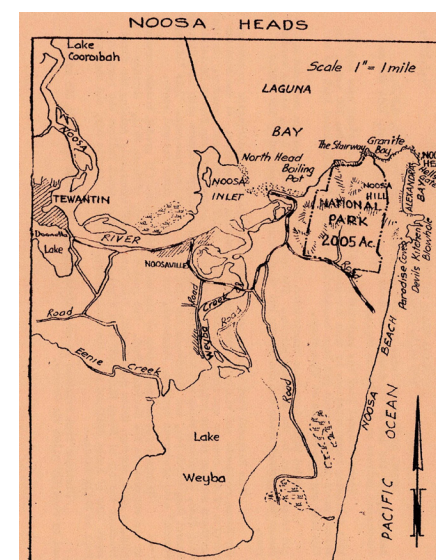


Photo Banner: Noosa NP – Theo Crazzolaro

Photos Inline: Noosa NP, NPAQ Trip – NPAQ 1954 Archives

WILDLIFE FEATURE

The Opalton Grasswren: Jewel of the Outback

– The Editor

Hidden amid the spinifex and rocky outcrops of the rugged Queensland outback dwells a tiny avian gem: the Opalton grasswren (*Amytornis rowleyi*). With its striking plumage and elusive nature, this diminutive bird embodies the spirit of resilience and adaptation in one of Australia's most inhospitable environments.

Discovery and Description

Considered a subspecies of the striated grasswren until 2020, the Opalton grasswren is a relative newcomer to the world of avian taxonomy. With its distinctive black-and-white plumage adorned with bold streaks of chestnut, this small, ground-dwelling bird cuts a striking figure when perched against the backdrop of its arid habitat.

With a species epithet that honours renowned ornithologist Ian Rowley, the Opalton grasswren is a testament to the thriving biodiversity in the remote corners of the Australian outback. Its unique coloration and wary behaviour make it a challenging subject for study, with few sightings and limited information available about its ecology and behaviour.

Habitat and Adaptations

The Opalton grasswren's preferred habitat is the spinifex-dominated grasslands and rocky outcrops that dot the arid landscape of central Queensland. Here, amid a maze of spinifex tussocks and boulder-strewn slopes, the grasswren finds refuge from predators and shelters from the scorching daytime heat.

To survive in this harsh environment, the Opalton grasswren has evolved a suite of adaptations that enable

it to thrive in its arid domain. Its slender build and long legs allow it to move swiftly and gracefully through the dense vegetation, while its cryptic plumage provides perfect camouflage against the rocky terrain.

As a primarily ground-dwelling species, the Opalton grasswren forages for food on the ground, where it feeds on a diet of insects, seeds, and small invertebrates. Its sharp eyesight and keen hearing help it detect prey and avoid predators, while its elusive nature and secretive behaviour make it a challenging subject to study.

Conservation Status and Threats

Like many aridland species, the Opalton grasswren faces a precarious future due to habitat loss and degradation caused by factors such as grazing, mining, and wildfires. Fragmentation of its already limited range further compounds the challenges facing the species, restricting its ability to disperse and find suitable habitat.

Predation from introduced species poses a significant threat to the Opalton grasswren, with feral cats and foxes preying on vulnerable individuals. Climate change exacerbates the threats, reducing the availability of food and water and increasing the frequency and intensity of wildfires.

Conservation Efforts

In response to the declining status of the Opalton grasswren, concerted efforts are underway to safeguard its future. The recent State government's landmark

acquisition of 352,589-ha Vergemont Station adjacent to Diamantina National Park marks a significant victory for wildlife conservation in the area. By expanding protected areas, creating conservation corridors and preserving critical habitats, this acquisition provides additional refuge for vulnerable species like the Opalton grasswren, aiding their survival in the face of mounting threats.

Looking to the Future

As we navigate the complexities of conservation in the 21st century, the Opalton grasswren serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of protecting even out-of-the-way habitats and little-known species. By working together to address the root causes of the species decline and to secure its habitat, we can ensure this tiny avian jewel continues to grace the outback with its presence for generations to come.



Photo Banner: Spinifex grass in Diamantina NP – Bill and Mark Bell

Photo Inline (above): Opalton grasswren (*Amytornis rowleyi*) – Laurie Ross via eBird

RANGER SPOTLIGHT

– Senior Ranger Kim Fleischfresser
Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS)



Since the young age of 7, Kim has always wanted to be a Ranger and has worked hard to make her dream a reality. After graduating with First Class Honours in a Bachelor of Applied Science in Natural Systems and Wildlife Management, a post-uni reality check hit Kim when she realised just how competitive it was to become a Ranger.

'After some 80 or so job applications, and a year's fulltime volunteer work with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) in Maleny, I finally secured some temporary work on K'gari—my dream work location. Nine months later, I became permanent, and over 13 years on the island, I worked my way up to Ranger in Charge.'

Following a change of scenery, Kim now works from Rockhampton as the Senior Ranger for our Fitzroy management area. Kim and her team manage a diverse array of landscapes.

'From the parabolic dunes of Byfield, to the Berserker Ranges, and Mount Etna National Park limestone cave network, to the sandstone country of Blackdown Tableland National Park—I love the natural and cultural values of these areas and appreciate their importance to the local communities and economies. It's also pretty cool having the honour of contributing to the conservation of the endangered bridled nailtail wallaby!'

Senior Ranger Kim manages a team of 5, overseeing a broader team of 16, where the majority of her role is to mentor and support her team to achieve priority tasks, as well as to build relationships with key members of the community.

'My work days are fairly varied, except for the volume of emails and meetings, I think that's pretty standard business for a Senior Ranger. I value the regular conversations and meetings we have with our First Nations partners, other government agencies, Natural Resource Management (NRM) groups and our neighbouring property owners to further build on our working relationships.'

'I thoroughly enjoy assisting my team with coordinating and delivering projects.'

This could look like anything from project oversight on a camping area upgrade, as well as managing budgets, reporting on our business plan and departmental objectives to recruiting staff and working on health and safety priorities to ensure the safety of our team and visitors to our parks and forests.'

'Over the years I have seen increased pressures on our protected areas. With a growing population in Queensland and more visitors to our parks and forests, it impacts the visitor experience with the parks' natural values being potentially compromised. Our ability to attract and retain employees has also been a bit of a challenge, despite demonstrating some critical outputs and being on the frontline, as these same skills and experiences are highly sought by similar industries.'

Ranger Kim says a day in the life of a Ranger is never the same and they 'wear many different hats.'

'The role of our Rangers out in the field is incredibly diverse—they are essentially part police officer, fire fighter, paramedic, teacher, counsellor, landscaper, carpenter, plumber, septic treatment worker, project manager, fencer, lawn maintenance person, pest management specialist, administrator, financial manager and part whatever-else-comes-along!'

With this mammoth list of roles and responsibilities, Ranger Kim says there's many things we can all do to help our Rangers and the parks they work hard to protect—particularly in the very popular parks on her patch, like Byfield and Blackdown, which are at risk of being loved to death. *'...we have an ongoing issue with some people thinking they can take their 4WDs wherever they want, including into the sand blows. This behaviour can damage the natural and cultural values of the park, while also consuming a large amount of our time to manage. Time taken away from doing priority work such as protecting the amazing natural values of the area.'*

'At Blackdown Tableland National Park, the huge number of day visitors are

putting serious pressure on our sites and infrastructure and changing the visitor experience. Combatting the use of social media promoting visitation to sensitive and culturally significant sites within the Blackdown area has also been a challenge. We cannot stress enough, it's really important for everyone to stick to the designated tracks.'

Ranger Kim's top tip for visitors to help protect these amazing areas:

'Always check park alerts and do your research on the parks and forests website before you visit. This will help you to know where you can visit and give you the best opportunity to help conserve the area and avoid a fine! I know a lot of people rely on Facebook groups to get their information, but the most accurate source of information is on our website and signs on park.'

Ranger Kim is so very proud to wear the Ranger uniform and wants everyone to cherish just how much the 'herbie badge' means to our environment and our future.

'I've wanted to wear this uniform since I was 7 and am very proud to wear the herbie badge as, to me, it represents a passionate group of people who work very hard, often under the radar and quite selflessly. We just get the job done, and don't generally speak out or seek recognition for the work we do, but we do need the community to better understand the importance of the work we do to ensure our protected areas are protected and conserved well into the future.'

Visit the parks and forests [website](https://www.parks.qld.gov.au/visiting) to find out more on how to support Rangers like Kim and her team and have the best experience in our amazing parks and forests.

Photo Banner: Nine Mile (Byfield NP – Supplied)
Photo Banner (corner): Ranger Kim – Supplied

WHAT'S 25N

NPAQ Activities

Birdwatching Minnippi Parklands, Tingalpa

Date: 19th May 2024

Meet: 7:30am at 135 Stanton Road W,
Tingalpa, QLD, 4173

Cost: \$5

Leader: Geraldine Buchanan (07 3349 1109)

Mt Mathieson Circuit, Spicers Gap

Date: 26th May 2024

Meet: 9am at Spicers Gap Road, Swanfels, Qld, 4371

Cost: \$5

Leader: Mary Anne Ryan (0436 393 999)

Lower Bellbird Circuit via Caves Track – Lamington
National Park Binna Burra Section

Date: 29th June 2024

Meet: 8:15am at 1069 Binna Burra Road,
Beechmont, QLD

Cost: \$5

Leader: Mary Anne Ryan (0436 393 999)

Vegetation Management Group 2024

Date: 18th May, 22nd June, 20th July

Meet: 9am at Jollys Lookout Lower Carpark,
Mt Nebo Rd, D'Aguilar National Park

Cost: Free

Leader: Angus McElnea (0429 854 446)

Birdwatching Toohey Forest

Date: 23rd June 2024

Meet: 7:30am at 30 Forest Ct, Griffith, QLD, 4222

Cost: \$5

Leader: Mary Anne Ryan (0436 393 999)

Birdwatching Eagleby Wetlands

Date: 21st July 2024

Meet: 7:30am at Logan street, Eagleby, QLD

Cost: \$5

Leader: Geraldine Buchanan (07 3349 1109)

Upcoming NPAQ Major Events

NPAQ Seminar

Date: Late July 2024 TBD

Time: TBD

Venue: TBD

Cost: TBD

Organiser: Samantha Smith

NPAQ Annual Dinner 2024

Date: Early June 2024

Time: TBD

Venue: TBD

Cost: TBD

Organiser: Samantha Smith

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Middle Name

Last Name

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