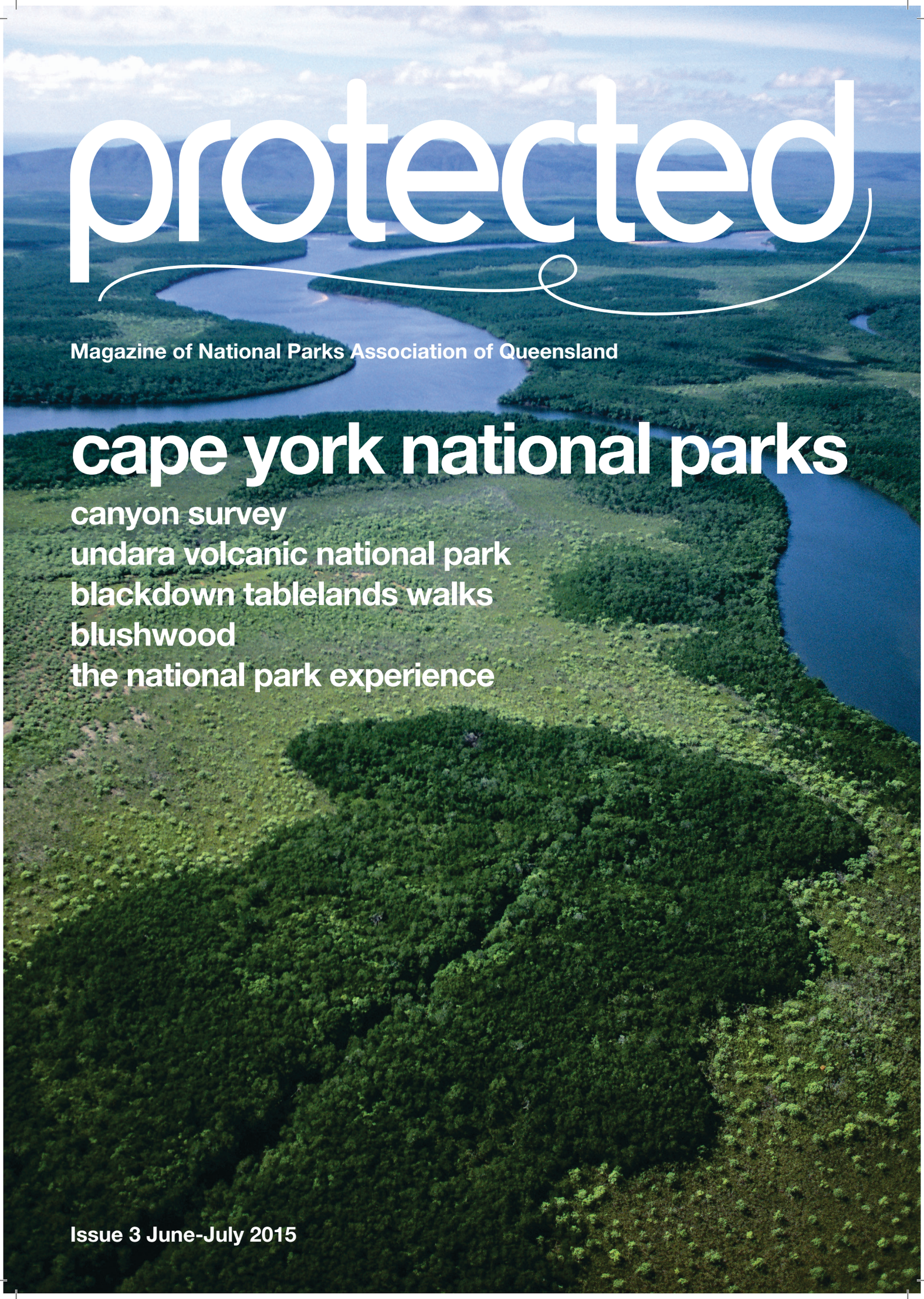


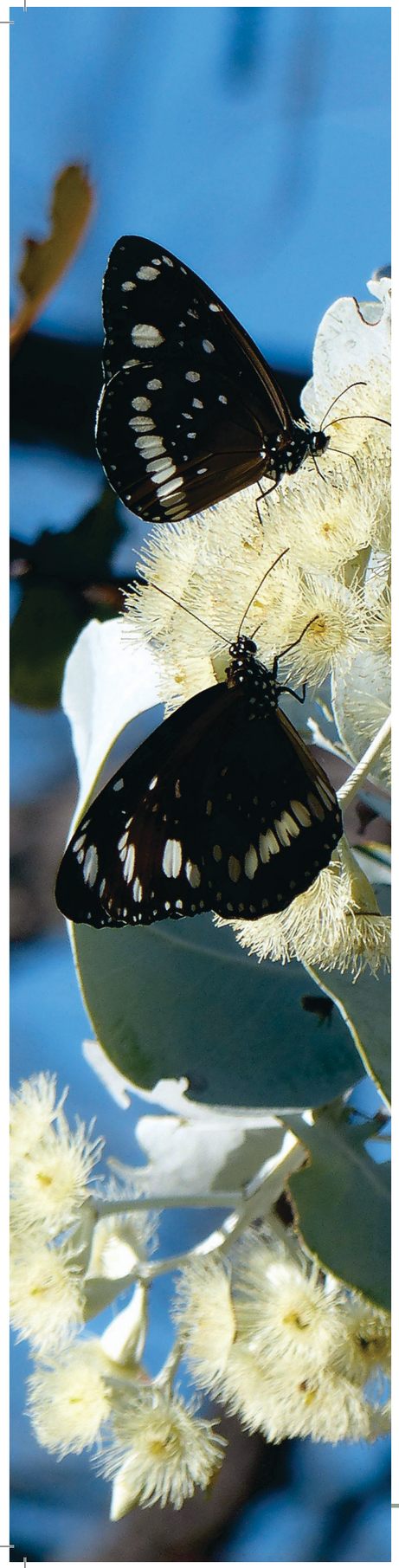
# protected

Magazine of National Parks Association of Queensland

# cape york national parks

canyon survey
undara volcanic national park
blackdown tablelands walks
blushwood
the national park experience

Issue 3 June-July 2015



## **Welcome** to the June/July edition of ***Protected***

**Michelle Prior, NPAQ President**

A draft decision from the United Nations conservation agency UNESCO has recommended that the Great Barrier Reef not be placed on the World Heritage 'In Danger' list. Whilst this provides relief for the Australian and Queensland governments, it remains to be seen if this recent 'scare' will result in appropriate actions being undertaken to provide sufficient relief to the reef. UNESCO flagged concerns about the poor outlook for the reef, and recommended that the reef be placed on the watch list for two years.

This edition of ***Protected*** takes us to Central, North and Far North Queensland. National parks in Queensland capture areas of natural and cultural significance, and highlight the biological and geological diversity of our large state.

The feature article describes the land tenure reform in Far North Queensland arising from conservation and Indigenous cooperation. This reform delivered new national parks to Queensland, whilst simultaneously assisting the return of land back to Traditional Owners.

The second article provides the context for, and gives a summary of, what was found during the recent survey of The Canyon National Reserve System property near Forsayth in the Einasleigh Uplands. This and 11 other properties remain ungazetted as national parks.

Far North Queensland trumps again with the finding of the magical cancer curing berry of the Blushwood tree, which grows only in FNQ.

The marvels of the volcanic Undara National Park are under the spotlight, including the wonders of one of the world's longest lava tube cave systems in the world.

## Contents





## Mission Statement

The National Parks Association promotes the preservation, expansion, appropriate management and presentation of National Parks in Qld.


## Contact Details

Unit 10/36 Finchley Street, Milton
PO Box 1040, Milton QLD 4064
ABN: 60 206 792 095
Phone: (07) 3367 0878
Web: www.npaq.org.au
Email: admin@npaq.org.au




## Advertising enquiries

admin@npaq.org.au

## Images

Cover - Starke Coastal Wetlands (Kerry Trapnell)
Page 2 strip - Butterflies on eucalypt flowers at The Canyon property (Sheena Gillman).

# CAPE YORK TENURE RESOLUTION PROCESS


**Andrew Picone**
**Northern Australia Campaigner**
**Australian Conservation Foundation**


The Cape York tenure resolution program is one of the most successful and longest running land use and conservation planning processes in Australia. Since 1995, the Queensland Government has returned 3,225,000 hectares of land on Cape York Peninsula back to Aboriginal ownership including 1,933,958 hectares of jointly managed National Parks and over one million hectares of Aboriginal freehold.

### Background

The process was born out of the early campaigns to prevent the sale of the Starcke and Silver Plains pastoral stations to foreign developers.

Out of these campaigns, the Cape York Land Council, Australian Conservation Foundation, The Wilderness Society and the Cattlemen's Union reached agreement with the signing of the Cape York Heads of Agreement in 1996.

Signing on to the Agreement in 2001, the Queensland Government began acquiring the most important properties throughout Cape York to protect their natural and cultural values. Additions were made to existing national parks during this period, including Cape Melville, but it was not until amendments were made to the Nature Conservation Act 1992 and the introduction of the Cape York Peninsula Heritage Act 2007 that the Cape's national park estate began its transformation.

These changes provided a unique balance between protection in perpetuity while still accommodating Traditional Owner rights and interests under Native Title legislation. This became the basis for allowing Australia's first Aboriginal owned and managed national parks.

### A new chapter in Australia's National Parks

Reflecting the changes to legislation, National Park CYPAL – Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land – provided a unique tenure that allowed joint management of national park between Traditional Owners and the Queensland Government.

The first national park under these new legislative arrangements was declared as Lama Lama National Park (CYPAL) in 2008 in the country around Princess Charlotte Bay on Cape York's east coast. That same year also saw one of the most significant conservation outcomes on Cape York for many years.

With the support of the Kaanju, Umpila, Lama Lama and Ayapathu Traditional Owner groups the rainforests of the McIlwraith Range were protected in the KULLA National Park (CYPAL). Together with the Iron Range rainforests, they comprise some of the most extensive, diverse and least disturbed forests of their type in Australia. Scientifically they are recognised as unique examples of overlapping South East Asian flora of more modern ancestry and the more ancient Australian and New Guinean flora and fauna; all contributing to their potential World Heritage significance.

### New beginnings for old parks

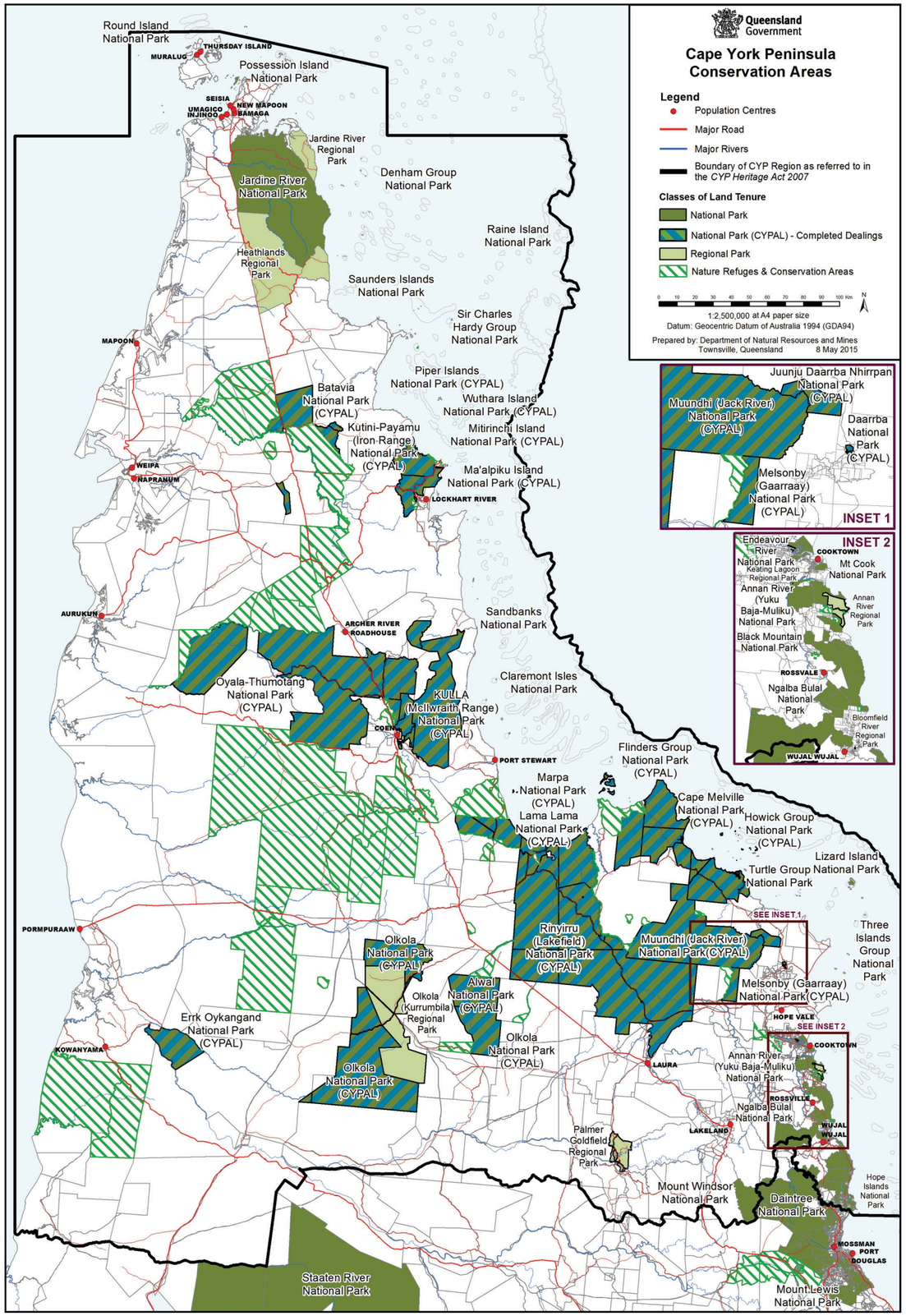
Across Cape York, all national parks declared since the 1970s are being returned to Aboriginal ownership and re-named by local Traditional Owner groups.

The first of the old parks to be returned was the 37,000 hectare Mitchell-Alice Rivers National Park declared in 1977. Back then, little consideration was given to the Traditional Owners, the Kunjen and Oykangand, many of who reside in the nearby community of Kowanyama. In 2009 it was renamed Errk Oykangand National Park (CYPAL) and is now jointly managed.

Since then, the once familiar names of the old national parks across the region have followed suit. Over the last four years Lakefield became Rinyirru, Mungkan Kandju became Oyala-Thumotang and Iron Range became Kutini-Payamu National Parks. The re-naming is an important aspect of the return of the parks and the recognition of their cultural significance. Jardine River is the final remaining park to transferred across to the CYPAL tenure.

### Righting a wrong

Importantly, steps were taken in 2011, before the transfer of Mungkan Kandju National Park back to Traditional Owners, to put right what then Premier Anna Bligh described as "a shameful chapter in Queensland's history". When Queensland Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen declared Archer Bend National




Park in 1977, which later became part of Mungkan Kandju, his motivation was not conservation. John Koowarta and a number of his fellow Wik Mungkan countrymen sought to purchase the Archer Bend pastoral holding in 1974. This land was part of the Wik Mungkan people's traditional homelands. They had maintained a strong connection with their country by working and living on the Archer Bend property for many years.

Despite a legal right to purchase the land which the Wik Mungkan successfully took to the High Court, Bjelke-Petersen prevented the sale by declaring the Archer Bend National Park. For the last 30 years, many Aboriginal people saw this as an example of how protected areas can serve as another form of dispossession.

In 2011, 75,854 hectares of the former Archer Bend section of Mungkan Kandju was revoked from the park's former 456,000 hectares. Of the revoked area, 32,000 hectares became a nature refuge to protect the extensive monsoon and riverine rainforests of the Archer River demonstrating the Traditional Owner's goodwill and commitment to conservation.

### Charting new ground and re-making history

In 2010, the Queensland Government returned the 42,510 hectare Mulkay pastoral lease to the Olkola people of south central Cape York. Knowing the significance of that country, the Olkola decided that the area needed protection. Together with the Queensland Government the Olkola declared the Alwal National Park (CYPAL), named after the endangered golden-shouldered parrot which inhabits the area.

In December 2014, the historic hand-back of five pastoral properties totalling 633,630 hectares brought the Olkola people's total land-holdings to 766,272 hectares, which is most of their ancestral homelands. It was also one of the largest single handovers in recent history. The deal included one of the largest national park declarations since 2008. The new 269,630 hectare Olkola National Park (CYPAL) protects ancient bora-grounds, rock art and many other cultural values important to the Olkola people. Extensive wetlands, rare and unique tall open forests, remnant rainforest refugia and vast tracts of intact savannah woodlands are also conserved. These habitats also support populations of the critically endangered golden-shouldered parrot and many other rare and threatened species of flora and fauna.

### Sticking with a good process

The process was created to provide land use certainty through the identification, acquisition and protection of areas of high natural and cultural significance. It is now viewed as the most successful land use planning initiative on Cape York Peninsula. Despite changing governments and other policy agendas, the tenure resolution process has continued to deliver.

Since 1994 the Queensland and Federal Governments have spent around $48 million on the strategic acquisition of properties for cultural and natural conservation values. While there have been substantial outcomes over the last twenty years, a number of very significant properties remain subject to ongoing negotiation and await return to Traditional Owners. This includes the iconic Shelburne Bay and former Bromley lease. Both have substantial conservation and cultural values and have come perilously close to destructive development from sand mining and the infamous Cape York spaceport.

The return of these lands back to their Traditional Owners under the terms of the Cape's unique tenure resolution process provides multiple benefits across social, cultural, economic and environmental imperatives.

All images courtesy of Kerry Trapnell - http://www.kerrytrapnell.com/gallery-list

East Coast wetlands (pg3)

Emerald Python, McIlwraith Range Rainforests (above)

Jardine River Catchment (pg5)

Map courtesy of Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines

# CANYON SURVEY

**Paul Donatiu, NPAQ Principal Advocate**

Our Christmas Appeal in 2014 focussed on using iconic species (primarily the Gouldian Finch, but also other listed endangered species) to attract interest in building political momentum for the gazettal of 12 national reserve system properties as national park. These12 properties had been purchased between 2010 and early 2012, and eventually should constitute a 400,000 hectare addition to the park estate in Queensland. From 2012 to the start of 2015, all 12 properties were part of a protected area review established by the then LNP State Government - a process which sought to examine the tenure of all gazettals made since 2002 (1.2m ha).

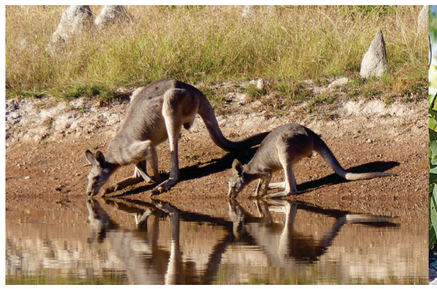
With an ALP minority State Government now in place, the new environment minister the Hon Dr Steven Miles has moved quickly to assure conservationists and the broader public of his interest in converting these properties to national park. However, the Minister faces the same complications arising from the extent and coverage of mining exploration permits that his predecessor faced (10 of the 12 properties are affected by these permits). In short, it is likely that permit free areas of the 12 properties will be gazetted as National Park in this term of State government, with permit-affected areas gazetted as Regional Parks. Mining exploration permits are viable for 5-10 years, and the expectation is that the State Government will actively work to retire permits over the next decade, allowing Regional Park areas to be upgraded to National Park in due course.

One of these properties was a place called The Canyon, two hours drive west of Undara Volcanic National Park in the Einasleigh Uplands.

The initial Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) report on The Canyon summarises its conservation and strategic value:

*The Canyon incorporates a significant part of the Newcastle Range and its associated red soil tableland, a biogeographic isolate and centre of endemism with high species diversity (especially invertebrates). Four rare and threatened plant species, as well as a number of other priority species have been recorded on, and in the vicinity of the property. The property has a high diversity of ecosystems (25) including several that are naturally restricted in distribution and five which are currently unrepresented. The whole area is of 'State Significance' for biodiversity. The plateau area provides a recharge surface for wetlands and adjacent springs and watercourses, and the remainder of the property covers upper catchments of tributaries of both the Einasleigh and Etheridge rivers. The property includes the western bank and alluvials of the Einasleigh River, a perennial spring-fed watercourse.*

Black-breasted Button-quail (Ross Monks)



One of the commitments made to donors from the 2014 Appeal was that a proportion of funds raised would be used to resource a survey team to identify the conservation values of one of the 12 properties. The Canyon property was selected because:

It is within the known range of the Gouldian Finch (which previously covered much of Northern Australia).

Populations of Black-throated Finches have been recorded within 10km of the Canyon (on neighbouring properties to the east).

It is accessible - the Canyon lies 30km east of Forsayth (with only the last couple of kilometres of road travel on gravel); it is also the closest of the four properties to a major airport (Cairns or Townsville).

The Canyon NRS property was surveyed by a team of nine ornithologists, botanists, ecologists and traditional owners from Monday 18th May to Friday 22nd May 2015. Although NPAQ had hoped to get a team on site earlier, this was the earliest date post-election that weather conditions were conducive to survey effort and that key participants were available.

The purpose of the survey was to compile results into a report that can be used to highlight the conservation values of this future National Park, and the importance of its gazettal, to Minister Miles and the broader public.

In total, surveyors found:

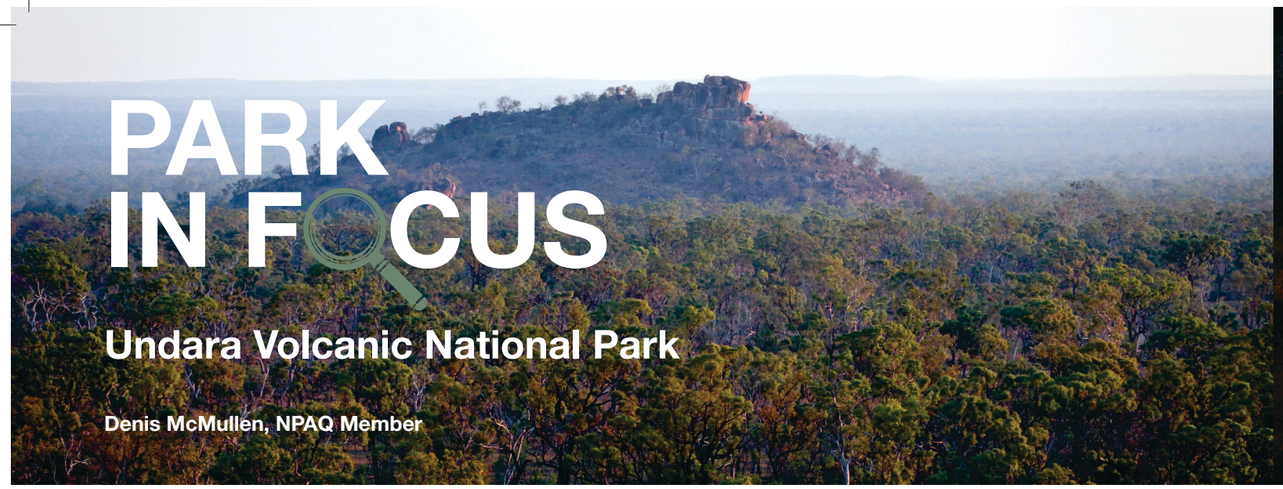
80 species of birds including a population of Squatter Pigeons (vulnerable), 231 species of plants including ***Solanum augustum*** (endangered; found during preliminary work) and ***Cycas cairnsiana*** (a stunning blue-grey cycad listed as a vulnerable species), the most western record of some regional ecosystems (such as ***Eucalyptus exserta*** woodland on alluviums), various species of macropods, snakes, frogs, geckoes and invertebrates, many of which are still to be formally identified.

They also conducted a number of transects through various parts of the property to confirm some of the regional ecosystems found on this future national park. The lack of a proper monsoon during the 2014/15 summer meant that the property was largely dry, with little grass seed to attract species such as the Gouldian Finch.

The final Canyon Survey Report will be available shortly. Our very sincere thanks to the nine wonderful people who gave their time, energy and passion to document some of our fascinating wildlife, and to the generosity of all our donors who made this survey possible!

Images clockwise from top left - Eastern Grey kangaroos, Squatter Pigeon (***Geophaps scripta scripta***), Blue dragonfly, native bees, Canyon dam, Bumpy Rocket Frog (***Litoria inermis***), Freshwater snake (***Tropidonophis mairii***), and Bynoe's gecko (***Heteronotia binoei***).

All images kindly supplied by Sheena Gillman and Elly Hetlam.



# PARK IN FOCUS

## Undara Volcanic National Park

**Denis McMullen, NPAQ Member**

Undara National Park is set in the McBride Volcanic Province, 400km northwest of Townsville. I grew up believing that Australia was bereft of volcanoes – a slow realisation that there were some "extinct" ones around didn't excite me. The Undara experience opened my eyes: standing on the rim of Mt Kinrara, a scoria cone, I didn't need binoculars to spot a large number of hills of volcanic origin. The McBride province alone had over 160 volcanoes.

Undara was a shield volcano – it was low lying, and belched and disgorged lava over a very long period starting some 190,000 years ago and engulfing more than 155 square kilometres of country. Undara, at an elevation of 1100 metres, is at the highest point of the Province so the estimated 23 cubic kilometres of lava, at 1200oC spread across country in all directions, but some flowed down existing watercourses:

These flows cooled and hardened on the outside but the effect was to provide insulation for the lava still flowing inside. This flow continued until the volcano stopped erupting, leaving the drained tubes hollow. This allowed the lave to spread unbelievable distances, over 90 km to the North and over 160 km to the Northwest, the latter becoming the world's longest lava flow from a single volcano.

The size of the tubes was another surprise. Barkers Cave, formed when the lava flow through a narrow gorge was constricted into a vertical oval has been measured at 13.5 metres high. Many other caves reach widths of 10 to 17m, though there are many which are smaller. 26 caves have been measured, as reported in Atkinson (2001), but another 30 or so have only been estimated. The total length that the Atkinsons report of caves discovered to their date of publication was 6,040 metres.

The caves are terminated with piles of rocks from roof collapses, so the longest sections are less than 300m, with most much shorter. It is thought that the latest eruption, from the Kinrara Volcano, was around only 10,000 years ago, a blink in geological time.

This Cainozoic volcanic activity is part of a process that extends 4,000kms along the east coast of Australia from Cape York to Tasmania in a band extending 200–400km from the coast. It includes the vast lava flow fields extending from Melbourne to Warrnambool, remnants of which can be seen at the Organ Pipes National Park. The existing Undara volcano crater is an unimpressive 20m high, but is 340m across and 49m deep. Running north and northwest are two alignments of depressions up to 100m wide, most choked with dark green rainforest-type vegetation, which like the growth inside the craters, is a relic of the Gondwana rainforest. These depressions are thought to be remnants of drained lava ponds.

It seems that the tubes were not used by the local indigenous people - there have been no discoveries of wall paintings or camp sites. Perhaps there must have been sufficient bad experiences of sudden disappearances as people fell into some of the many holes left in the area, or deaths from asphyxiation as people entered tubes full of carbon dioxide. There must have been song-lines and stories warning of the evil action of dark spirits in the area. The whole area remains dangerous for the unwary, so open access is not possible.

In post invasion times, the area was selected by the Collins family in 1862, and worked as a cattle property, but it was only in 1989 that Gerry Collins decided to buy and develop the area, containing many of the tubes, as a tourist attraction. In 1991 however, the Queensland Department of the Environment began a process of acquiring the property from the Collins family and reached an agreement where the property was gazetted in 1992 as a national park and the family retained a significant area outside the park to develop as a tourist facility, with access to the tubes available only through guided tours. Interestingly, the proposal that Undara should be gazetted as a national park originally came from the Queensland National Parks Association in 1967.

The result has been that national park Rangers work on developing the infrastructure and caring for the land, including controlled burning of the extraordinary grass growth that follows a Wet Season, whilst the management of visitors is controlled by the Savannah Guides operating from the Undara Lava Lodge. The Savannah Guides organisation is committed to conservation and the Guides have to meet high levels of knowledge and skills to be accredited. 40,000 visitors come to the Lodge to view the tubes each year and the Guides ensure that while the tubes that are visited are treated with respect and visited safely, many other tubes are left undisturbed. As each tour member also pays a park fee as part of the tour cost, this provides a significant income for the Park.

So, what is the Undara Experience like? You can stay in beautifully converted railway carriages, cabins or swag tents. An Evening Wildlife Tour will take you to Barkers Cave where the insect-eating micro-bats take flight at dusk and sweep out of the cave entrance in their thousands, avoiding the ambush of pythons and black tree snakes hanging from fringing trees. When I was there, we went to some of the other 8 visited caves, including one flooded by the heavy rain, where swimming was available in the metres deep, blue-tinted rainwater, cold and refreshing after the heat outside. We also walked through the Arch and the Wind Tunnel, which is a 289 metre long section, with eucalyptus roots hanging from the roof, drawing moisture from the damp atmosphere inside the cave. The tubes are huge, really overwhelming, and the interiors are highly coloured.

The textures and designs displayed in the caves are remarkable. The intense heat left glazed surfaces. Other material such as the underlying pink granite and sand, picked up and melted by the heat, provide a kaleidoscope of browns, white, greys, reds, yellows and black in vast irregular displays.

There is prolific wildlife around the Lodge, including wallaroos, wallabies and eastern grey kangaroos, a wide range of birds, including the Australian bustard and Brolga. There are also great nightly presentations on the wildlife from the Savannah Guides. Tours can be complemented with bushwalking through well-signed walks. Some of these incorporate scrambling over granite boulders to gain views across the plains, worth the effort when timed with sunset.

Whilst the family company has a 75 year agreement with the Queensland Government, the success of the Lodge is obvious. It bring a lot of tourists into the Park under circumstances which protect a very special environment, and the Department controls the numbers of visitors who can access the National Park. It seems like a good example of symbiosis on a large scale, and a model for sustainable development of other parks.

References

Atkinson A and Atkinson V 2001. Undara Volcano and its Lava Tubes. Brisbane.

http://www.nprsr.qld.gov.au/parks/undara-volcanic/

All images courtesy of Matthew Kenwrick - https://www.flickr.com/photos/58847482@N03/sets/

# FEATURED WALK

## Trails in Blackdown Tableland National Park

**Michael McCabe, Capricorn Conservation Council**

Rising to over 900m, and perched at the conjunction of the Shotover, Dawson, and Expedition Ranges, the rim of Blackdown's uplifted sandstone cliffs stand above the undulating alluvial plains.

The sheer, red-gold sandstone cliffs of Blackdown Tableland dominate the view from the Capricorn Highway whether you're approaching from the west or east. The surrounding country, formerly dominated by Brigalow (*Acacia harpophylla*) ecosystems, has been substantially altered through broadscale clearing for grazing and cropping. The Tableland and plains lie over the Bowen Basin coal measures formed during the Late Permian Era (250-270mya) when Australia was still part of Super-continent Pangea.

Blackdown, the traditional home of the Ghungalu people, was first sighted by Europeans in 1844 when Ludwig Leichhardt crossed the Expedition range into Arcadia Valley east of Carnarvon Gorge while following the Comet River, on his First Expedition to Cape Palmerston. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service have been working progressively with Ghungalu custodians to celebrate their continuous stewardship of country, through the protection of galleries, naming of locations and installation of interpretative signage.

The height of the tableland, its deep eroded gorges, natural spongy peat springs, and low nutrient sandy soils, has created a unique cool, damp microclimate resulting in numerous endemic species of flora and fauna. Towering up to 45m the Blackdown Stringybark (*Eucalyptus sphaerocarpa*) drew the attention of saw-millers right up to the declaration of the National Park in the 1970s. Sydney Blue Gum (*Eucalyptus saligna*) survives here as a geographically isolated reminder of an earlier wetter climate. The majestic trunks of Rusty gum (*Angophora leiocarpa*) will, depending on the season, display hues of grey, pink, or orange bark - great for photos at early light and dusk.

While the cliffs, gorges, overhangs, and balancing boulders appear timeless, the vegetative variation is spectacular. June to September is golden with the scent and floral sprays of over 30 wattle species, including the aptly named Zig-zag wattle (*Acacia macradenia*) and the large broad-leaved Acacia bancroftiorum. Banksias, grevilleas, boronia, bottlebrush and many other flowering shrubs attract nectar and insect feeding birds aplenty. Quiet group or solitary walks, which allow frequent stopping and sitting, give the best bird observing experience.

Depending on fire frequency, you may encounter spikey thickets of leguminous shrubs such as *Pultenaea millarii* and *Daviesia quoquoversus* displaying their yellow-orange 'bacon and egg' flowers. Long sleeves, trousers and gloves are highly recommended for off-track walking to minimise scratches. In recent decades, with longer dry periods interspersed with above average wet years, there appears to be a thinning of Blackdown's understory scrubs and reduced recruitment of larger species as many of the 100+ year old trees succumb to hotter more frequent fires.

Cross country walking can still be a very rewarding experience if you have the fortune to arrive after recent rains have freshened the native grasses, encouraged leaves to reshoot from epicormic buds, and scrambling vines like *Hardenbergia violacea* are producing masses of violet flowers.

The cracks and overhangs of deep potholed, solid sandstone creek beds, cascades and larger waterfalls are a haven for mosses, sun-dews and other delicate species. Tread softly and look where you step and you will see miniature forests of ground orchids, fringed lilies, micro ferns and the endemic cycad, *Macrozamia platyrhachis*.

Since the cessation of logging, visitors no longer have to negotiate with timber-jinkers on the narrow tracks. For the uninitiated and regulars alike, the pea-like iron-red (bauxite) pebbles prevalent on roads and tracks make it seem like you are on roller skates, and many weary walkers have had thrills and spills on the last leg back to camp. Fortunately for visitors, access to most of Blackdown's scenic features has been made easier with the sealing of the range road, well maintained camping area, and the full diversity of walking experiences from leisurely circuit strolls, short morning/afternoon walks right through to serious multi-day treks.

If it's your first time, a morning tea picnic/brunch at the top of the range road is recommended. Stepping from the car you'll immediately notice the cooler air compared to the flatlands. The lookout just past the picnic tables - Yaddamen Dhina (Horseshoe Lookout) - provides vistas to the north and an opportunity to be greeted by inquisitive Two-lined dragons *Diporiphora bilineata*; just be wary of uninvited table guests, such as cheeky Pied-Currawongs and Kookaburras, which will plunder food right out of your mouth! Check out nearby Goodela - a great little 1.8km walk.

After arriving at the Munall campground on the second Mimosa Creek crossing, the first day can be occupied with short easy walks (under 3km) to Mook Mook Lookout down the gorge with easy grades and creek crossings, or a walk upstream to the Ghungalu galleries. If you have several days to explore there's no rush to see it all at once. Find your site, stroll downstream a couple of hundred metres to see the deep circular eroded pools, the first of the series of falls, surrounded by varied vegetation providing a haven for chirruping unseen frogs, a variety of birds, water dragons and skinks.

Blackdown's major streams, after forming deep gorges, cascades and falls, drain southwest to the Comet River (Planet Creek), north to the Mackenzie River (Stoney Creek-Blackwater Creek), north-west to the Mackenzie (Spring and Charlieview Creeks) and south-easterly to the Dawson River (Mimosa Creek). The latter has the most reliable flows. Stoney Creek Falls has the greatest sheer drop, flowing spectacularly but briefly following big rains. Even if bone dry, it is nevertheless very worth the long, often hot walk.

Day 2 is usually a good time to drive past the camp grounds to spend a day at Gudda Gumoo (Rainbow Creek lookout). This requires moderate fitness for the 3.6 km return walk, and further if intending to continue to the falls and negotiate the many steps leading to the pool and cascades below the falls.

For experienced, fit bushwalkers with expert navigational and climbing skills, Rainbow Creek and access road can provide the start/end point for 2-3 day walks south to the Ballamoo Cliffs, the southern edge of the National Park and the beginning of Expedition Range. Local bushwalking groups have completed many of these walks taking in Planet Creek and Falls along the south-western escarpment.

A gorge walk (2-4 days) bouldering, to below the large falls in Mimosa and Rainbow Creeks is possible but advice should be sought from QPWS Rangers and people who are aware of accessible 'get-downs' and numerous hazards (particularly the lack of any ability to make outside contact, and extreme rescue challenges).

As the Central Queensland coal mines expanded around Blackwater, and Blackdown became more widely known, its increasing popularity required limitations on camping sites and the closure of some tracks. Early bookings are essential for overnight and longer camping, but its also close enough with an early morning start to Rockhampton and other towns for highly enjoyable day trips.

All images by Lorelle McCabe - from page 10 clockwise - Rainbow Falls, Mimosa Creek and Rainbow Creek potholes.

More information: http://www.nprsr.qld.gov.au/parks/blackdown-tableland/about.html

# WILDLIFE FEATURE

## Blushwood

**Michelle Shaul, Contributor**

Although its name might give the impression of a modest and unassuming plant, this endemic Queensland tree has something big to boast about – properties in its berries appear to be able to kill cancer.

A unique and discerning tree, *Hylandia dockrillii* is found only in the tropical rainforests of North Queensland between Cooktown and Tully at an altitude range of 400-1100 meters. It is the only known species of the *Hylandia* genus (named in honour of renowned Australian botanist Bernie Hyland) and a member of the Euphorbiaceae family.

The Blushwood begins its life underground as a swollen, bottle-shaped stem before growing to a height of around 14m, well below the Atherton Tablelands' lush canopy. On the tough but flexible stems grow dark green leaves 8-20cm long by 4-10cm wide with raised veins. Its small delicate flowers have white petals with short, soft rust-colour hairs covering the outside of the sepals.

While its wood provides good general-purpose timber, its dark brown barky trunk is too skinny to be of any interest to loggers. Instead, it's the tree's velvety crimson berries that have researchers excited about establishing Blushwood plantations.

For the past nine years, forest ecologists Paul Reddell and Victoria Gordon of the biotechnology company EcoBiotics have been researching the medicinal potential of the blushwood berry. After noticing that animals avoided eating the fruit, the husband-and-wife team sent a sample of crushed kernels to a commercial laboratory that in turn found powerful anti-cancer properties. Since then, the couple have been working with scientists from the Berghofer Medical Research Institute in Brisbane to see if the berries could be developed into an effective cancer treatment, with astounding results.

The resulting compound, a drug called EBC-46, acts quickly and rapidly when injected or applied as a gel to an external tumour or melanoma on animals. Within a few minutes the lesion turns red and then purple as the drug cuts off the blood supply. Within a few days only a scar remains.

It's believed that EBC-46 works by stimulating a local tissue response that cuts off the blood supply and kills the tumour. With a 70% success rate, a single injection has been able to kill most kinds of large-mass tumours and cancerous tissue in a variety of animals. Not only does the drug stimulate a rejection of the tumour, but it also appears to encourage tissue repair, reducing the patient's healing time. In these pre-clinical trials, the results have been long-term and enduring, with very little relapse over a 12 month period.

With such encouraging initial results, researchers are moving into the next stage of testing. EBC-46 is currently being used in formal veterinary clinical trials in Australia and the USA and is awaiting final regulatory approval for Phase I human clinical trials. However, researchers caution that the drug can only be used on cancers accessible for injection or topical treatment; there is no evidence that EBC-46 would be effective for metastatic cancers.

It's incredible that such a promising treatment for a life-threatening disease that affects so many people and animals across the world has been sitting right in our backyard. How many more of these medical treasures are hidden away in the national parks of Queensland, Australia, or the world?

How many have we already lost and how many more could we lose if we don't act to protect them?

*Hylandia dockrillii* in flower in far north Queensland (Hugh Nicholson)

# THE NATIONAL PARK EXPERIENCE

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

**Annette Flower, NPAQ Member**

Can you imagine a world without National Parks?

Nowhere in the world was there a National Park until 143 years ago when Yellowstone in the US became the first in 1872. Just a few years later, in 1879, the Sydney (Royal) National Park was the first to be declared in Australia and only the second in the world. A notification in the Sydney Morning Herald of 29 March 1879, in part stated:-

*A National Park*
*The Government have taken the important step of setting apart a large and very suitable tract of land for a National Park, which will be within easy reach of Sydney…….and which, when the trustees to whom the land will be vested have dealt with the park in accordance with the arrangements that will be made for its preparation and management, and when our proposed system of branch railways is carried into operation, will afford to the people of the whole colony means of sport and recreation not to be surpassed probably in the world…..*

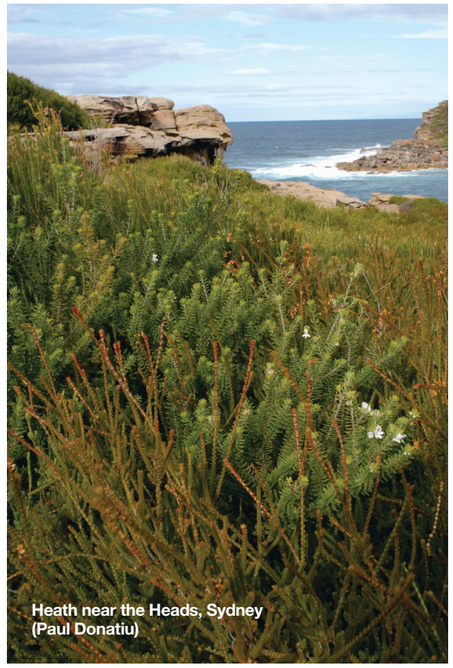
Fast forward almost a century and a half and we're in a totally different world. Can I imagine a world without National Parks? Absolutely not! Since retiring more than a decade ago my life has been enriched immeasurably by walking in national parks both in Australia and overseas. Most recently in parks in Sichuan province in south west China, I was blown away by the blazing autumn foliage colours and watching a 'so cute' family of endangered Golden snub-nosed monkeys leaping in the treetops. In parks in Japan it was heart-warming to see the clusters of little children sitting on the ground framed and perfumed by gorgeous cherry blossom trees.

These natural experiences are integral to my lifestyle and to that of millions worldwide. The tourism industry is a huge user of national parks, and it's no wonder. People are increasingly looking for walking holidays to pristine places where the goals of a healthy lifestyle, fitness, genuine cultural exchanges and senses-filled experiences are a balm for their mental health and happiness. But national parks today serve many purposes other than 'sport and recreation'. Now the imperative of conservation of flora and faunal species and indeed of the very land itself, under constant threat from population growth, climate change, mining and gas demands and development, is of primary importance.

A big plus in the national parks experience for me, wherever I'm walking, is the information and resources provided by interpretative centres. National Parks personnel these days gather and analyse data, do research, conduct field projects, and carry out advocacy and lobbying and education of the public.

We humans, more than ever need the peace, awe, respect, wonder and humility generated by special landscapes. The wise thinkers who envisaged National Parks a century and a half ago, (there are now more than 6,500 parks worldwide and around 650 here in Australia) would be rightly proud of their legacy. Can I imagine a world without National Parks or the dedicated, passionate people who care about them for future generations? For me, such a scenario is unthinkable, and I've got a sneaky feeling that I'm already talking to the converted.

Annette Flower is a long-tern NPAQ member and a passionate lover of national parks!



**Heath near the Heads, Sydney (Paul Donatiu)**

# WHAT'S ON 25

## NPAQ Activities

### Vegetation Management Group

Saturday 18 July

Location: Brisbane area

Leaders: Angus McElnea, Russell Gardner (0429 854 446)

Be part of a great revegetation program at Boombana and Jollys Lookout in the heart of D'Aguilar National Park, right on Brisbane's doorstep.

### Birding at Tingalpa Reservoir

Sunday 19 July

Location: Brisbane area

Grading: Easy

Leader: Geraldine Buchanan (3349 1109)

Fee: $3 (members), $10 (non-members)

The Trotter Family donated 28 hectares of bush in 1958 which became the core of the Reserve. The main track wanders through Scribbly gum woodland with a heath understory of grasstrees, banksias, barb wire grass and wild may.

### Vegetation Management Group

Saturday 22 August

Location: Brisbane area

Leaders: Angus McElnea, Russell Gardner (0429 854 446)

It's almost spring - a great time to get your hands dirty in our wonderful restoration project at Boombana and Jollys Lookout, D'Aguilar National Park!

### Mount Maroon

Saturday 29 August

Location: Mt Barney National Park

Grading: Intermediate

Leader: Mary Anne Ryan (3277 8889)

Fee: $3 (members) $10 (non-members)

Depart from the Cotswold Track and follow the north-east ridge to the summit of Mount Maroon. This mountain is one of the most botanically diverse places in Southeast Queensland, and provides habitat for a wattle found nowhere else in Australia! Wonderful views to Mt Barney to the south from the top.

### Daves Creek Wildflower Walk at Lamington National Park

Sunday 30 August

Location: Lamington National Park

Grading: Easy

Leader: Dave Jones (3343 2447)

Fee: $3 (members) $10 (non-members)

A shortish 12km walk from Binna Burra timed to cooincide with the peak of the wildflower season!

Walkers will leave Binna Burra and climb gradually to about 1,100 metres through a variety of vegetation communities including sub-tropical and temperate rainforest, and box forest, before emerging onto montane heathland containing a profusion of native wildflowers.

Morning tea at the Molongolee Cave or nearby lookout before lunching on Surprise Rock with magnificent views towards the Gold Coast and Mts Hobwee and Merino.

Part of this view captured in the image below by Paul Donatiu.

For more information, or to register for an activity, please go to the website - **www.npaq.org.au/events**





## Upcoming Activities

### Extended Bird Activity to Capricorn Coast

Monday 31 August to Saturday 12 September

### Vegetation Management Group

Saturday 19 September

### Birding at Oxley Creek Common

Sunday 20 September

### Long Weekend Camp, Goomburra section, Main Range NP

Saturday 3 to Monday 5 October

### Vegetation Management Group

Saturday 24 October

### Birding at Moggill Regional Park, Anstead

Sunday 25 October

## Calendar Dates

**World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought**
17 June
www.unccd.int/en/programmes/Event-and-campaigns/WDCD/Pages/default.aspx

**World Population Day**
11 July
www.unfpa.org/swop

**National Tree Day**
26 July
treeday.planetark.org/about/

**National Science Week**
15 – 23 August
www.scienceweek.net.au/

**National Biodiversity Month**
September
http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/biodiversity-month

**National Threatened Species Day**
7 September
http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened

## NPAQ Events

### Kaputar and the Warrumbungles

Wednesday 15 July

Location: Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens Auditorium from 7.45pm

An evening with NPAQ member Stewart Parker who will speak about his 2011 adventure to Kaputar and the Warrumbungles.

### Australian Antarctic Division

Wednesday 19 August

Location: Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens Auditorium from 7.45pm

An evening with Trevor Luff on the latest cutting-edge science programs and research projects of the Australian Antarctic Division.

## Notice of Annual General Meeting

National Parks Association of Queensland Inc. invites members, supporters, and interested parties to the Annual General Meeting to be held at Mt Coot-tha Botanical Gardens Auditorium on **16 September 2015** at 5:30pm.

## James Cuthbertson National Park Volunteer Project Grant

To honour the legacy of James Cuthbertson, NPAQ will be initiating the James Cuthbertson National Park Volunteer Project Grant in 2015. A grant of $2,000 over two years will be awarded to a volunteer project that benefits national parks or other protected areas in Queensland. After the initial grant period, other projects may be considered, such as research projects. Criteria and details forthcoming. Thank you to Don Marshall for this suggestion, and to everyone who offered suggestions.

## Vale

Our sincere condolences to the families of the members below who have recently passed away:

Jean Harslett
Oliver Hess
David Morwood
Una Webster

## Letter to the Editor

How good it was to see the Mt Coot-tha Auditorium full on 22nd April for a conservation seminar and to mark the 85th anniversary of NPAQ! Apart from the cross-section of NPAQ members, the number of visitors with conservation interests added an extra dimension to the evening.

We listened with interest to the Hon Dr Steven Miles, Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef to hear what the new Government has in store. His message was encouraging but some resolve seems to be needed in the areas of grazing and commercial development in national parks. Questions ranged through sand mining, park classification, revenue and Departmental structure to name a few. Hopefully the Minister took away our message that national parks should be valued for their conservation and natural heritage worth and not for their potential commercial worth.

Jason Jacobi, Executive Director Regional Operations West, QPWS, grabbed our attention with his rapid-fire presentation on challenges in the practical management of the natural environment covering about half of Queensland. Jason's update on several issues dear to NPAQ was direct, diplomatically showing the need to protect the estate while delivering on instruction of the government of the day. It appears that restoration of the cardinal principle to its original form needs more attention and our support.

Quiet enthusiasm for his work was apparent in the presentation from Allan Williams, Director of Landscape Conservation, DEHP. Allan's ground breaking modelling concerning resilience and climate change provided an insight into the planning necessary for conservation of important areas in changing conditions. The topic is large enough for a series of sessions.

The combination of the three speakers made for an interesting evening. It gave some encouragement but also demonstrated the need for NPAQ and kindred organisations to keep working to lift environment issues higher on the Government's agenda. The seminar was a good example of NPAQ's advocacy and information sharing work.

Leon Misfeld

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www.npaq.org.au

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Julie, 2014

*Thank you so much. We have really enjoyed your company, as well as your guiding and assistance. It has been a terrific experience.*
Cheryl, 2015

*It really was life-enriching.*
Roslyn, 2015

*The chance to relax and take it easy after a long satisfying day of walking was food for my soul.*
Marilyn, 2014




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