

TKMG Case Studies Project

'Conservation of remnant vegetation on private property on the Atherton Tablelands'

Stage 2 – 2002/03

The management practices of another three Atherton Tableland farms have come under the focus of the Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group (TKMG). Working together, the landholders and the Group determined those practices that can be put in place to fully benefit the farm and its wildlife, with the focus being on tree-kangaroos.

The TKMG has received funding from the Natural Heritage Trust to continue its project, 'Conservation of remnant vegetation on private property on the Atherton Tablelands'. In a series of another three case studies, the project identified major issues associated with the conservation of remnant vegetation and devised and implemented a wildlife habitat management plan for each property.

The project worked with landholders to conserve and restore remnant vegetation and wildlife habitat on their respective properties. On ground works such as tree planting, weed control and cattle exclusion fencing were features of the project. The selected landholders, who volunteered to take part in the project, had already shown commitment in this direction and their properties are important pathways and/or habitats for the focus species, the Lumholtz's tree-kangaroo.

Dr John Kanowski, of the Rainforest Cooperative Research Centre, completed an assessment of the conservation requirements of tree kangaroos for each property. Kylie Freebody conducted a survey of native vegetation and weeds on each property. Sue Mathams and Larry Crook were appointed project managers.

The three properties being studied belong to Reg and Olive Waltham (Millaa Millaa), Brett and Carmen Fry (Malanda) and Neil and Lyn Coleman (Yungaburra).

The project is receiving assistance from the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service's Centre for Tropical Restoration at Lake Eacham in the way of technical advice and the supply and maintenance of trees.

Property profiles

Fry's beef property has frontage to both the North Johnstone and Ithaca Rivers. This property provides an important riparian corridor for wildlife to travel from a large rainforest remnant on a neighbouring property on the Ithaca to the North Johnstone and then north and south to other extensive remnants. On a broader scale, the remnants and riparian vegetation on the North Johnstone and Ithaca Rivers may provide some connectivity between populations of tree-kangaroos in the west of the tablelands and the more marginal populations in forests on the eastern escarpment of the Atherton Tablelands.

The Frys have fenced off the rivers and replanted the top of the riverbank.

The Walthams are engaged in wildlife management on their beef property by protecting their remnant rainforest and allowing some of the steeper land and gullies to revert to regrowth forest. A substantial 6ha remnant is the centrepiece for the property and is where current tree-kangaroo activity is most common.

Dr Kanowski reported that, "The rainforest vegetation on Waltham's property helps link the highland forests of Mt Fisher with the mid-elevation forests on the eastern edge of the tablelands".

Coleman's Farm is essentially two farms, one of which is owned by Lyn and Neil Coleman. It is a beef and crops property that has 20ha of endangered Type 5b, or 'Mabi', forest on it. As the name Mabi suggests (a local indigenous name for the tree-kangaroo) it holds prime Lumholtz's tree-kangaroo habitat.

"I estimate that the rainforest and regrowth on *Coleman's Farm* supports 35–70 tree-kangaroos," said Dr Kanowski. "The Coleman family has conserved the Mabi forest remnants on *Coleman's Farm*, which collectively at 50 ha, is the largest privately owned Mabi forest remnant. It has high conservation value because of its size and because it adjoins the Curtain Fig National Park/Yungaburra State Forest. The 5b forests in the Park and State Forest and adjacent properties, including Coleman's, support the major population of tree kangaroos in the northern part of the Atherton Tablelands". On the basis of studies conducted in these forests, Dr Kanowski estimates the tree-kangaroo population to be in the order of 200 – 450.

"This population would be the major source of animals dispersing into smaller remnants northwest of Malanda", he said.

