



Mammal Mail

The Newsletter of the Tree-Kangaroo & Mammal Group

Vol 20 No 3 April 2020

What's Going On? Don't Miss These Upcoming Events

Please note that our 2020 program of public presentations is currently suspended until further notice. We look forward to resuming this program as soon as circumstances allow. Until then stay well and stay connected with TKMG news via our Facebook page and website.



Why not post a photo from your backyard?
We'd love to see images of the wonderful wildlife that share your patch.

Reflections of a Roving President

by *Peter Valentine*

Many of you will know that I have been missing in action for the past two months – a mega trip to Western Australia with some tasks on the way. My thanks go to Leanne Hales who stepped up as Acting President during my absence and of course a lot of daily business is conducted by the Secretary Amy Shima anyway! My road journey saw Val and I visit some World Heritage and potential WH sites on the way to Perth and we had planned to visit others in WA. As is the case for many, our plans were strongly affected by the threats of COVID19 and the actions of our various governments. We had planned to be present for the birth of our grand-daughter (Rosalie Wren) but by the time this happened the circumstances had changed and we decided to forgo seeing the new baby (and her parents) and make a dash through SA for home. Eight days and 5,000 km later we (my wife Val and I plus Martin and Sam Willis, our travelling companions) managed to get home on the 30th March! Now we are in mandatory isolation for 14 days and then most likely continuing isolation for many months. My sympathy goes out to the many people adversely affected by this pandemic, the many with friends and family caught up with the cases and with those who are suffering in different ways as a result of

the virus. Your committee has already had to modify our activities (cancel presentations and abandon meetings for example) but some work goes on. While lockdown inhibits group activities, individuals do continue their work and the various social media help overcome isolation, real or perceived. More information will be forthcoming for members as we all adjust to the new reality. We remain completely committed to continuing our role to help raise the conservation profile to better protect our mammals. Our biodiversity crisis continues and climate change remains a threat to most life on earth. The pandemic is but a hiccup in the grand challenges ahead. It is times like this that perhaps we need more women in charge, who can so much better multi-task than the males who seem to hold the top jobs.

One of the more depressing elements of our journey was confronting the vast areas of wildlife habitat that have been burnt to a crisp (along with millions of animals). In every State, we saw the scars of hot fires, many in protected areas set aside for wildlife. In places, we also encountered tragic impacts from drought with little food available for domestic stock or for wildlife. In the Flinders Ranges in northern SA, badly affected by drought, we found emaciated Wallaroos feeding on the harsh needle foliage of grass trees. In other places, starving kangaroos waited listlessly along the roads and adjacent wasteland to die. In such places, Wedge-tailed Eagles were thriving. We were delighted to find in at least some places drought-breaking rains had brought green back into the landscape and plants were responding well. I wanted to visit the Gawler Ranges (also in SA) to check its potential as a World Heritage Site so we headed north west from Kimba and camped in the National Park. Sadly, it has also been decimated by drought and even more so by last summer's extreme heat. Temperatures over 50 degrees C had been experienced on several successive days and one ranger told us that at that time many birds were simply dying of heat exhaustion; falling out of the sky. That helped explain the paucity of wildlife seen. Surrounding grazing properties had clearly been overstocked and grazed back to bare earth. Further on in Western Australia vast areas of the Great Western Woodlands and other extensive areas of unique vegetation communities (such as Stirling Ranges National Park) had been burnt so fiercely that where once there were trees now there was simply bare ground. There was much to cry about.

Luckily not all was doom and gloom and good rains have been falling in many places and recovery of sorts is underway. Some areas were not impacted by drought or fire and in such places wildlife was evident and plentiful. We camped in the Lower Glenelg National Park (coastal Victoria) and were delighted to see many beautiful Swamp Wallabies. Elsewhere in the journey, we were pleased to see many kangaroos and wallabies, along with emus and a range of other species. One highlight was some honey possums in the flowering Proteaceae plants at Cheynes Beach on the south coast of WA, always a treat. There are many plant species that flower in autumn in this community and therefore give us humans a treat but more importantly a critical source of food for wildlife. Overall, the trip also provided many wonderful views of birdlife including several never seen before.



Wallaroos surviving on grasstrees 'leaves'
Flinders Ranges NP, SA



Kangaroos looking OK in the
Fitzgerald River NP, WA



Honey Possum feeding on a
Calothamnus flower

It is a novel world for all of us at the moment: movement restrictions and forced isolation challenge us to find different ways to pursue our love of wildlife. Luckily there is a host of resources in the virtual world and some clever ways to use these for education and enjoyment. Perhaps some members would care to share their experiences over the coming weeks about wildlife enjoyment while based at home. It could be an excellent chance to learn more about a particular group of mammals or even to find out more about our Wet Tropics endemics. In closing I want to mention that this pandemic gives us an opportunity to both reflect on life and consider future changes that are necessary for all of us to survive. To continue on as before is not a sustainable option. As I see the community come together to support each other in this challenging health crisis, I have hope that we can continue to join forces to make the changes to our society and way of life to ensure there is a future for all wildlife as well as for we humans who have caused the problems. I remain optimistic and am heartened by the demonstrations of care and concern emerging daily across the planet. If we can shift some of that into the current political leadership there may yet be a chance for the radical transformation we need. Let's stay safe for the moment and consider our future. In the meantime, please take time to share your wildlife experiences in the time of COVID19 through short pieces for the next Mammal Mail.

MEMBERS IN THE NEWS

contributed by *Ceinwen Edwards*

It is fantastic to see TKMG members get recognized for their contributions to wildlife preservation. The Autumn edition of *Hunter&Coastal Lifestyle Magazine* features an article about **Anne Williams** and her *Life of Conservation*.



Anne is well known to the committee and many TKMG members as she has come to a few of our committee meetings and made us the lovely TKMG banner that we use at the market stalls. Anne comes up to the Tablelands from just north of Newcastle at least once a year and has been called on by Margit to mind her tree roos while she is overseas or to run the Bat Hospital while Jenny is away.

As Vice President of **Hunter Wildlife Rescue**, Anne provided comment following the recent drought and horrific bushfire season.

“Koalas get all the publicity right now, but a lot of other animals are affected too. Flying foxes have been hit really hard. They suffered from the lack of humidity in the air because of the drought and the heat. It’s a little bit better now after the rain we have had. But there isn’t enough food either. Even though the trees had blossoms, there was no honey in them. So the adult foxes were underweight and they left the young ones hanging.”



To read the full article by **Tania Reid** go to: <https://hunterlifestyle.com.au/2020/03/a-life-of-conservation/>

Like Anne, many of our members are located far from the Atherton Tablelands. The geographical spread of TKMG supporters extends from St Kilda to Speewah, from Bunbury (WA) to Brinsmead in Cairns. TKMG members are located in every state and territory of Australia.

We are grateful for the far-reaching concern for the unique fauna species of Far North Queensland.

GLIDER NEWS: Tumoulin Forest Frolics

by Peter Pattison and Jan Bode

Last year, my partner and I put our hands up to 'assist' with Amanda Kaiwi's glider monitoring program in Tumoulin forest. We have now had several trips into this wonderfully varied area off-siding for Amanda and John Winter on the ongoing feed tree inspection, monitoring and maintenance program. During our visits, Amanda has patiently schooled us on the gliders and their feed trees and technical details of the monitoring, while ensuring we don't get lost. Her hope is that an expanded pool of monitoring expertise can be established to assist with the long term protection of this critical glider habitat.

Our involvement so far has been both interesting and rewarding, and an opportunity to get out into a wonderful forest. We would encourage others to take up this opportunity to become similarly engaged (especially with the onset of cooler weather). Dress appropriately in long pants, long sleeved shirt, robust walking shoes and hat. Amanda will supply gloves or other gear required.

Please contact Amanda if you are interested in volunteering – amandakaiwi@gmail.com

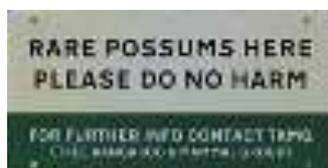
OLD BUT GOLD

Volunteers Sally and Trevor Day recently undertook a project to renew signage in Gilbey Forest. Mentored by John Winter, Sally has become a regular on YBG surveys and is now training new residents who live in Gilbey to help with transects and monitoring.



"This is the last one of the forty-year old signs, nearly obliterated by Father Time and Mother Nature, that still remain in view. These signs were placed in Gilbey Forest to indicate the habitat of a Yellow-bellied Glider population.

I believed it was beneficial to renew them in order to uphold the original intention. Rupert's gentle but most persuasive, thought-provoking wording has been kept exactly the same except for enquiries which are now directed to TKMG." Sally



Thanks to Rupert Russell for initiating the original concept and to our dedicated volunteers who manage the ongoing monitoring.

Trevor and Sally Day with the new sign, which reads

Rare Possums Live Here Please Do No Harm
at the entrance to Gilbey Forest.



Australia's Latest Environmental Report Card

by TKMG President *Peter Valentine*

The Australia's Environment Report was released on March 30. Prepared by the Australian National University it brings together many measures to show the condition of the environment across the nation, arranged to show the overall picture but also showing each region's Environmental Condition Score. The headline news is that our environment has never been so unhealthy.

"The [report for 2019](#), makes for grim reading. It reveals the worst environmental conditions in many decades, perhaps centuries, and confirms the devastating damage global warming and mismanagement are wreaking on our natural resources."

If there is a spark of good news amongst the depressing realities, it is that much of northern, central and western Queensland scores in the positive rather than negative for the ECS although southeastern Queensland is as bad as everywhere else. An interactive map allows readers to view each region separately. The Report is an excellent reminder that while we struggle with COVID19, our country is desperately in need of environmental care and better management. Let's not forget the long view. Visit the report online at: <https://theconversation.com/au/environment>



Securing our livelihood into the future

Based on an article by Penny Van Oosterzee and Siggy Heise-Pavlov

Living on the Atherton Tablelands within the Wet Tropics is a privilege. It's a special place to live. We have more species of plants and animals than anywhere else in the country - all packed into our quarter of a percent of the continent.

Our land use reflects this with grazing (based on relatively natural environments), nature conservation and agriculture respectively, being the three top uses. Notably nature conservation has increased 158% over the past decade, with the other land uses decreasing. The Tablelands economy depends largely on agriculture (\$257 m) and tourism (\$114 m) with tourism, mostly based on natural assets, growing as income from agriculture slowly declines.

As a region, much of our livelihood depends on natural values. And these are now under threat from climate change. Most recently, predictions that the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area would lose over half of its endemic species have been shown to be shockingly true and happening faster than imagined. In April 2019, the Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) responded to this scientific evidence - based on 400,000 data points - by calling for an immediate 10-point response. These include land

restoration, pest and fire management, and community and industry partnerships to collaborate on the response.

Pre-empting this, the TRC has recently formed a Tablelands Natural Asset Management Network comprised of a range of government, private and community stakeholders. This network provides advice to the TRC on policies and practices of managing our natural assets - things like biosecurity risks, fire and water resources management, avoiding human-wildlife conflicts, and revegetation.

The network, itself a reflection of community partnership, welcomes WTMA's 10-point plan noting that the local community are already pro-active in land restoration, fire management of habitats, such as for the Yellow-bellied glider, and in addressing threatened species listing, while many others are involved in partnerships for better community and environmental outcomes and engagement across different sectors.

The network notes the great potential for expanding and improving these partnerships. For instance, a recent project, that involved local councils, DES, WTMA and community members (the Gillies Range Road Clean-up and Litter Prevention Project) - and that has recently received the Wet Tropics Cassowary Award - has potential to truly engage communities to reduce pollution to our iconic forests and to prevent litter from range roads to be washed into the Great Barrier Reef. Future projects will also involve monitoring conditions across the region.

Our communities are caring and eager to contribute to better manage, protect and improve the biological assets that secure our livelihood.



Pictured (L–R): Tudor Tanase (TRC), Don Crawford (Maroobi Park Nature Refuge), Sigrid Heise-Pavlov (The Iggies Nature Refuge), Mark McCaffrey (Ringtail Crossing Nature Refuge), Andrew Wood (Malanda Landcare), Angela McCaffrey (TREAT), Keith Smith (Department of Environment and Science), Penny van Oosterzee (Thiaki Creek Nature Refuge), Kylie Freebody (TRC) and Matt Wallace (Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service). Missing from photo: Peter Valentine (Tree-kangaroo and Mammal Group) and Travis Sydes (Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils).

<https://www.trc.qld.gov.au/tablelands-natural-asset-management-network/>

TKMG is an active member of the Tablelands Natural Asset Management Network. Current project work includes developing roadside signage to notify motorists of recent sightings, road kills and dog attacks on Lumholtz's tree kangaroos.

Caught on Critter Cam

Did you know that as a member of TKMG you have access to a library of Scoutguard trail cameras for wildlife surveys? Members can borrow sets of five cameras with rechargeable batteries and SD cards for up to one month duration to investigate the animals (native and feral) that inhabit their own backyard.

The cameras are also made available for local and regional research projects and to date have collected valuable data for: Southern Atherton Tablelands Quoll surveys, Rock Road Corridor functionality study, North Qld Natural History Group fauna surveys, the Nature Refuges Pig Control project and even Malanda Primary School Science Enrichment Program.

The cameras are easy to set up and take good quality images both day and night.



The above gallery is just a small selection of images captured by Kirsten Pearce and her children, Finn, Ruby and Bessie during surveys in East Evelyn and on Kenny Road. Many thanks to Kirsten and kids for sharing.

Borrow Critter Cams



If you would like to borrow some Critter Cams you can complete an online application form on the TKMG website <http://www.tree-kangaroo.net>

Or email tkmg.crittercams@gmail.com

Non- contact, home delivery of cameras may be arranged at this time.



Please Post to:

Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group, Inc. (TKMG)

PO Box 1409, Atherton, QLD 4883

e-mail: info@tree-kangaroo.net

Website: <http://www.tree-kangaroo.net>

President: Peter Valentine peter.valentine@jcu.edu.au

Vice-President: Leanne Hales halesfnq@gmail.com

Treasurer: Simon Burchill 0407-091-347 sbburchill@gmail.com

Secretary: Amy Shima 0499-180-961 info@tree-kangaroo.net

The opinions expressed in Mammal Mail are not necessarily those of the Tree Kangaroo & Mammal Group, Inc.



TKMG thanks Sustainable Solutions Global, Inc. for their generous sponsorship of the newsletter and website.