



# Mammal Mail

The Newsletter of the Tree-Kangaroo & Mammal Group

Vol 20 No 1 September 2019

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

**Thurs, Oct 3rd:** General meeting starting at 7PM-**including announcing the 2019 recipient of the William T. Cooper Award for Conservation of North Queensland Mammals**, followed by the TKMG Annual General Meeting then brief (30-45 minute) but magnificent presentation on wildlife of the Tropical Queensland by renowned photographer, Martin Willis. Light refreshments will be served. You will be able to renew your membership (or join up for the first time) prior to the meeting. There will be a Management Committee meeting at 5:30pm, all members welcome (but we'll put you to work helping to set up for the AGM).

**Thurs, Nov 7th:** 5:30pm Committee meeting at the Malanda Hotel; members are welcome to attend.

**Thurs, Dec 5th:** 5:30pm Committee meeting at the Malanda Hotel; followed by a special showing of a film about tigers by Stan Breedan.

**Is your membership up for renewal?** Please check (contact either Simon or Amy) and RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP. Please remember that TKMG memberships run with the **financial year** so memberships are **due for renewal July 1<sup>st</sup>**. Look for a date on your mailing label or email version of the newsletter. NOTE: **You will be able to renew your membership before the meeting on Thur October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Your support of TKMG is important and we look forward to seeing you at the October meeting.**

**Proxy vote for Annual General Meeting:** If you are a current, financial member of Tree-kangaroo and Mammal Group, Inc. and wish to vote at the upcoming Annual General Meeting to be held at the Malanda Hotel at 7 pm on Thursday, October 3, but are unable to attend in person, PLEASE CONTACT Amy Shima, Secretary (0499-180-961 or [info@tree-kangaroo.net](mailto:info@tree-kangaroo.net)) to request a proxy form.

**CALL FOR NOMINATIONS** for positions on the Management Committee. Nominations for candidates to positions on the Executive or General Management Committee of TKMG need to be made in writing/email by 2 financial members of TKMG –send nominations to: [info@tree-kangaroo.net](mailto:info@tree-kangaroo.net) or TKMG PO Box 1409 Atherton QLD 4885. The nominee (candidate) must agree in writing or via email to his/her candidature. If nominations for positions on the Executive (President, Vice-President, Secretary & Treasurer) are received prior to 20<sup>th</sup> Sept, then no nominations will be accepted from the floor. If there are open positions on the executive management committee and for positions on the general management committee, then nominations from financial members of TKMG will be accepted from the floor on the night of the Annual General Meeting.

**FROM THE PRESIDENT**

*By Peter Valentine*

For some reason my commitments seem to have overtaken my free time ... probably not a thing other members of TKMG experience (!!), but it can be disconcerting. However, a lot of that has been generated by others, including opportunities to make comments about issues of importance to our organisation. One of those is the current Senate Inquiry into our faunal extinction crisis. Readers may recall we made a timely submission last year but then the Inquiry was postponed because of the election and it has only just recently been given a new life. A call by the Inquiry for additions to our submission gave an opportunity to update the pressing concerns about climate change (and the horrific experience of our Spectacled Flying Foxes last summer was one). We also had the latest results from Steve Williams long-running monitoring of our wildlife showing further cause for concern and precipitating a statement by WTMA about the effects of climate change on our Wet Tropics wildlife. A final added concern came from the Queensland Auditor's report on the many failings of the Queensland Government in addressing threatened species. While we on the ground have long been familiar with the issues, the formal review has brought these failings into front and centre. We might only hope that the Queensland Government responds by appropriately resourcing the department and requiring improved action on threatened species. But I am also confident an audit of the Federal Department would reveal similar failings – lots of talk but little real action. On your behalf, I have recommended such an audit.

Another major distraction for me has been the publication of a new book that I spent a lot of time writing over the past two years. It's about our Australian World Heritage Sites and is published by the National Library of Australia – a handsome hardback volume with some stunning photography. The official launch takes place in Canberra at the Writers Festival and the book is available from the National Library.

Yet again Climate Change remains off the agenda of our Federal Government who seem preoccupied in avoiding reality and shoring up their retirement opportunities in the coal industry. I have hopes that our community will finally force the government to declare a Climate Emergency (not to mention an Extinction Emergency) and to that end it is wonderful seeing our schoolchildren taking leadership roles in the protests. There will be a big protest in Cairns on 20th September and I am sure there will be lots of older citizens there to support them. We are losing time in the race for our lives and we all need to urge the Government to act. The concept of tipping points seems lost on the average citizen and their political representatives ... perhaps it's an issue related to attention span? Our modern undemocratic media have also failed us by sweeping concerns under the table. It's up to us to speak up for our wildlife, if not ourselves.

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**Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Australia's Faunal Extinction Crisis**

*Drafted by Peter Valentine on behalf of Tree-kangaroo and Mammal Group*

What follows is a copy of the addendum to the original submission made by TKMG to the Senate Inquiry into Australia's Faunal Extinction Crisis. The original submission (number 70) can be found at:

[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment\\_and\\_Communications/Faunalextingtion/Submissions](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/Faunalextingtion/Submissions)

**Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications,**

Our organisation made an original timely submission to this inquiry on the 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2018. All the points made in that submission remain but we wish to make a brief addendum to our submission to add further evidence in support of our recommendations and to suggest an additional recommendation.

*Terms of Reference (e): [adequacy of protections for critical habitat]*

The risk to biodiversity from climate change has become even more clear and in response to that the Wet Tropics Management Authority has released an alarming statement about the threats to fauna within that World Heritage Area. The Board released a statement of concern and a 10-point climate plan following receipt of additional data from Professor Steve Williams.

*“Concerning new evidence has shown an accelerating decline in the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area’s unique rainforest animals as a result of climate change. The Board of the Wet Tropics Management Authority (the Board) has now become aware that, following the hottest summer ever recorded, some of the key species for which the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area was listed are at imminent risk of extinction.”* Wet Tropics Board, 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2019.

Many of the species at risk are mammals found only in this area, and the TKMG would urge the Senate Committee to consider these grave concerns and act to better protect the species. **TKMG applauds the Wet Tropics statement and urges the Senate Inquiry to respond to the urgent threats within this World Heritage Area.**

*Terms of Reference (i). [adequacy of monitoring]*

A second additional concern has been raised as a result of the Queensland Audit Office review of how threatened species are managed in the State of Queensland. This report was released on the 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2018 and provides a shocking indictment of failure on the part of the Queensland Government to undertake appropriate actions in response to threatened species. TKMG commends this report to the Inquiry as it shows insights about how little is achieved and how much more can be accomplished in the State of Queensland. It also has many lessons for the Commonwealth. The report noted:

*“The department has no strategy or framework for conserving or managing threatened species. This is despite the Nature Conservation Act 1992 requiring the department to develop an integrated and comprehensive conservation strategy for the whole of the state.”*

*“With few exceptions, the department does not currently know how threatened species are faring and whether management actions are having the desired impact.”*

A similar criticism might be equally levelled at the Commonwealth Department given that it has an inability to monitor conservation work being done for each of the listed species and it is only now putting together a framework to attempt such monitoring. Gaps in developing formal

recovery plans have already been noted in our original submission.

**TKMG recommends** that a similar thorough audit be conducted on the National program so a better understanding can be reached on what has been achieved and what gaps there are at the National level.

*Terms of Reference (I) [related matters]*

One additional concern, briefly referred to in our original submission, is Australia's National engagement with the Framework Convention on Biodiversity (CBD). Despite the closeness of the 2020 Conference of the Parties, and despite Government commitments, there seems to have been little or no engagement by the Australian Government with the wider community about how we are nationally progressing towards our CBD commitments and what specific steps we are undertaking to reduce extinctions of biodiversity. While it might seem obvious to most, there is no sign of Australia's faunal extinction crisis achieving any kind of Government attention in the national conversation – little or no attempt to engage the wider community in this critical issue. Instead, progress in recognition and action is left to community conservation groups and the wider members of the public (such as the Extinction Rebellion). Rather than lead the battle for species survival, the Government seems to be missing in action.

The members of the Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group look for national leadership to deliver a secure future for our many threatened species and to ensure that we Australians do everything we can to address the faunal extinction crisis.

Peter Valentine, President, Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group (Inc). 12/08/2019

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## **GLIDERS PLIGHT RECEIVES INTERNATIONAL AID**

*By Amanda Kaiwi*

*(This article was first published in the Cairns Post 25 June 2019 and adapted for use in this newsletter)*

High on the Tableland's Misty Mountains in the Tumoulin Forest Reserve lives a unique fluffy glider possum known as the Yellow-bellied Glider (*Petaurus australis* un-named subspecies), a part of the Wet Tropics Yellow-bellied Glider population which is restricted to a patchy, narrow band of Tall Eucalypt Forest on the western edge of rainforest above 600 metres altitude, separated by a 400km gap from the next population on the Clarke Range inland from Proserpine. Listed as 'Vulnerable' under both Queensland's Nature Conservation Act 1992 and the Commonwealth's Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act 1992 the Tumoulin Yellow-bellied Glider lives in total isolation from fellow gliders due to forest fragmentation of its habitat from past land clearing.

The glider is nocturnal, strictly arboreal (tree dwelling) and is unlikely to cross open ground. The glider's major food source is sap taken from *Eucalyptus resinifera* (Red Stringybark) which the glider obtains by cutting through the tree trunk with its large incisors. It also feeds on pollen, nectar and various insects. They den only in large live *Eucalyptus grandis* (Rose Gums). Some of the rose gums found in Tumoulin are estimated to be over 200 years old. Tumoulin Forest Reserve near Ravenshoe is an ecotonal forest, mostly wet sclerophyll with towering

eucalypt; a rare regional forest wedged between rainforest and dry sclerophyll.

The gliders in Tumoulin Forest Reserve have become isolated due to broad scale land clearing and their survival is intimately associated with the management and survival of these two tree species.

Under the umbrella of Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group, a small group of citizen scientists led by Wildlife Ecologist, Dr. John Winter, have dedicated their time over many years to collect data and endeavour to manage and educate the community on the gliders' diminishing habitat in the optimism of protecting the glider and its habitat in perpetuity.

Last month, the Yellow-bellied Glider Program hosted Wildland Studies, a university-level study group from the western parts of USA and Canada.

The Wildland Studies focuses on hands-on ecological and cultural learning and has been in north Queensland for some months, visiting various sites and projects for students to gain an appreciation of Queensland's incredible different forest types and reef.

Students spent a week in Tumoulin Forest Reserve working with Dr. John Winter and Amanda Kaiwi from the Yellow-bellied Glider program, clearing lantana from around large Eucalyptus den trees, assisting with night time census', and mapping certain trees in unsurveyed areas of the forest.

Chris Smith, team leader of the Wildlands group said, "despite the rain and leeches, the students enjoyed themselves enormously, with everyone observing the spectacular gliders up close and personal".

Some student comments: relating that these gliders were one of the coolest parts of the trip.

- *"Learning hands-on skills such as GPS mapping and compass reading, tree identification, and recognising glider feeding cuts - a positive advantage.*
- *"As part of our forest experience, a day was spent clearing lantana and raking forest debris from the base of the Rose Gums to reduce the risk of prolonged fires at their base which can eventually destroy the tree and ultimately the gliders lose a den.*
- *"Walking many kilometres through areas of Tumoulin Forest Reserve, the students expressed their concern that the giant Rose Gums that the gliders depend on for their dens are in very short supply.*
- *"We also noted a lack of young Rose Gums in the understory, and speculated how changing fire regimes, invasive species (such as lantana), and human mismanagement may grow, further endangering the precious gliders."*
- *Sean Overcash, a student, said "the gliders are so amazing, and have such an important role to play in supporting this forest, that it would be a great loss if this small population were to vanish, especially knowing there are few populations left in north Queensland."*
- *"Amanda and John gave us a great insight into the life and plight of the Yellow-bellied Glider and the disappearing wet sclerophyll habitat that threatens its immediate future.*
- *"It's been a great learning experience and we want to thank them for their time, effort,*

*patience and support extended to us during our time here.*

- *“You live in one of the most amazing places in the world and the community should be proud and look after this wonderful habitat,”* said Chris Smith

If you would like to know more about the Yellow-bellied Gliders or interested in becoming a volunteer to assist in protecting their habitat please email [info@tree-kangaroo.net](mailto:info@tree-kangaroo.net) .

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## **Feral cat sightings wanted**

Tom Bruce, a student at James Cook University, is doing a project on the abundance of feral cats are in the Wet Tropics and how these feral cats impact the wildlife communities residing within the rainforest as well as the wet and dry sclerophyll forest across the region.

To accomplish this Tom will be conducting a series of surveys, utilizing camera-traps, spotlighting and also do surveys for small-mammal and reptiles. Later in the course of the project, Tom’s study will incorporate tracking feral cats utilizing satellite collars as well as opportunistic gut contents analysis of dead feral cats. This suite of surveys will give a thorough insight into the abundance and distribution of most taxa within the region and potential factors influencing this including feral cat habitat use and dietary preference.

The first step of the project is to try and identify areas that likely have high and low densities of feral cats. This will be done using species distribution modelling. To this end any sightings of feral cats that can be provided by members of Tree-kangaroo and Mammal Group would be greatly appreciated. Information about sightings needs to include the date and time of the sighting. If at all possible, please provide the latitude and longitude for the sighting (you can use the gps map feature of a smart phone to get this information. Or provide Tom with a detailed description such as street address or other location identification would be in the helpful in establishing where the feral cat was seen. If you have any questions or can provide feral cat sighting information, please send an email containing your questions or data on feral cat sightings to: [tom.bruce@my.jcu.edu.au](mailto:tom.bruce@my.jcu.edu.au).

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## **FERAL CATS THREATEN THE SURVIVAL OF NATIVE SPECIES IN AUSTRALIA**

*Editor: Lee Beecheno - including information extracted and summarized from DEE and Feral Cat Scan websites*

<https://environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive-species/feral-animals-australia/feral-cats>

<https://www.feralscan.org.au/feralcatscan/default.aspx>

Have you seen a feral cat recently? Did you know that feral cats’ impact heavily on Australia’s unique native wildlife through predation and can carry diseases that be transmitted to humans, native animals and livestock? Australia has lost 28 mammals already to feral cats and another 120 native animals have been identified as at direct risk from this invasive species.

Feral cats are the same species as domestic cats; however, they live and reproduce in the wild and survive by hunting or scavenging. They are found all over Australia in all habitats, including forests, woodlands, grasslands, wetlands and arid areas. Feral cats are predominantly solitary and nocturnal, spending most

of the day in the safety of a shelter such as a rabbit burrow, log or rock pile. They are carnivores, generally eating small mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish and insects depending on their availability.

Predation by feral cats is listed as a key threatening process under section 188 of Australia's national environment law, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

Control of feral cats is challenging as they are found in very low densities over large home ranges and are shy, making them difficult to locate.



*Figure 1 Cat eating a crimson rosella*  
(Copyright C Potter - imaged source:  
<https://environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive-species/feral-animals-australia/feral-cats>)  
[pests.pdf](#).

The current control methods of shooting and trapping feral cats are quite difficult, expensive and time consuming and require skilled staff. The most effective form of feral cat control over large areas is poison baiting.

*The Threat Abatement Plan for Predation by Feral Cats (2015)* sets out a national framework to guide and coordinate Australia's response to the impacts of feral cats on biodiversity. It identifies the research, management and other actions needed to ensure the long-term survival of native species and ecological communities affected by predation by feral cats.

More information about the plan can be found at <https://environment.gov.au/system/files/pages/907fcf93-baf3-4a8f-bfdb-70bdf55aa90e/files/national-declaration-feral-cats-pests.pdf>.

#### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- **Prevent Feral Cats:** Consider the natural environment you live in and consider the ecological impact that maybe the result of getting a cat. Be a responsible pet owner. Identify your cat with a collar and microchip. Desex your cat as soon as recommended by a Vet. Confine your cat to your immediate living area/yard (inside your house or an enclosure). If you have a pet cat, make it an indoor (or cat-enclosure) only pet. Do not let the cat run free as it will kill birds, wildlife and spread diseases such as toxoplasmosis that can harm wildlife and humans.
- **Report feral cat activity:** Contact your local council for advice about feral cat management in your area. On the Atherton Tablelands, you can trap the cat and take it to TRC (remember, all trapped cats must be treated humanely). Contact: <https://www.trc.qld.gov.au/animal-services/cats/> for more information.  
You can also record feral cat management activities, including feral cat sightings, eradication and impacts on native species using a free app called **FeralCatScan**. This app has been created by a community mapping program called Feral Cat Scan and is available for download on iPhone and Android devices. For more information about the program and apps, see: <https://www.feralscan.org.au/feralcatscan/default.aspx>.
- **Don't feed feral cats:** An American study, *Feeding the Feral: A Study on Feral Cat's Environmental Impact*, looked at two feral cat colonies where feeding stations are maintained by volunteers or private citizens to help the cats. Those involved justify their actions as a "humane project for 100% benefit of our feline friends" but the question raised is, is this activity humane for the wildlife? The study found that not only do the feeding stations keep the cat populations healthy and on the increase, but also impact directly on the health and behavior of wildlife that feed on the cat food left out. <https://urbanwildliferesearchproject.com/feeding-the-feral-a-study-on-feral-cats-environmental-impact/>



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



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