



# Mammal Mail

The Newsletter of the Tree-Kangaroo & Mammal Group

Vol. 20 No. 4 August 2020

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

**Sat, Aug 22nd** : Yungaburra Markets – TKMG Stall

**Thurs, Oct 1st: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 7PM** Malanda Hotel

The Annual General Meeting for the Tree Kangaroo & Mammal Group is planned for Thursday 1st October, 7pm at the Malanda Hotel. Currently, due to covid restrictions, our usual light refreshments cannot be supplied but attendees are welcome to dine at the pub prior to the meeting. Following the meeting there will be a presentation by Jacqui Diggins from Terrain NRM about the role of dogs in conservation and her current work with Baxter (pictured with Jacqui below) to detect fireweed on the Atherton Tablelands.



See what our active members have been posting on the TKMG Facebook Page

[Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group FB Public Group](#)



Last edition we invited members to send in their stories of local wildlife observations to share here and on our Facebook page. We received some interesting accounts and entertaining tales of animal hijinks, in some cases with a bit of help from our **TKMG Critter Cams**. Many thanks to everyone who contributed.

### **The Toad-Killer of Malanda**

by TKMG President Peter Valentine

COVID 19 wrought changes in everybody's life, especially during lockdown. One option was to focus more on our backyard wildlife and that's exactly what I decided to do. I was motivated to try out some monitoring using critter cams by the discovery of a dead cane toad in one of our frog ponds in April this year. It was an interesting carcass because the upperside was intact but the underside had been sliced open and organs removed.



***The eviscerated toad found in my frog pond in early April.***

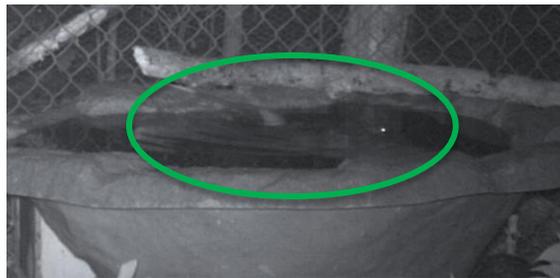
This sounded suspiciously like the situation I recalled reading about in an early edition of the North Queensland Naturalist. I went to the website and re-checked the paper, written by AJ Cassels in 1966. That described many cane toad carcasses being found, always next to water, in a similar disemboweled condition. In another instance the perpetrator was tentatively identified as a water-rat (now called Rakali). This paper is the first record I have found that recorded this behaviour. I was also told by Mike Archer that he and Janette Covacevich found similar occurrences when they did their survey work on cane toads in 1975 (in northern Queensland along many river systems). We often undertake toad reduction forays at our place to try and limit local build up and because we live in the rainforest toads are relatively uncommon. Our property borders the Johnstone River and it is only about 300 metres from the river to our house, well within foraging distance for Rakali.

Having found the toad carcass in our frog pond one consequence was immediately evident. The toxins had clearly washed out of the toad carcass into the pond water, as the small fish I keep in the pond to consume mosquito larvae were all dead. This was a fine opportunity to try and find a few answers. In the meantime, I threw the toad carcass away in the adjacent forest and cleaned out the frog pond, refreshing the water. I also arranged to borrow a TKMG camera and recharged the batteries on my own crittercam. I was a bit slow about this. The perpetrator definitely disapproved of my actions and demonstrated in no uncertain terms. The next morning the toad carcass was back in the pond with another two smaller carcasses! This time I left them there and set up the camera.

The next morning, I discovered that the crittercam had recorded the culprit – fishing out the toad carcass and further chewing the leg muscles, stripping them off the bones. But what was it? Rakali, or perhaps another candidate? One photo seemed to support the Rakali identification with a stocky broad head and happily aquatic. Another snapshot showed the animal swimming in the pond. One shot revealed the toad being brought out of the pond for consumption.



***The perpetrator reclaims its victim ... but what is it?***



***Swimming in the frog pond retrieving toads ... Rakali?***

Then a different shot shows the first glimpse of the all-important tail ... yes, our animal is swimming happily in the pond and the tail has a dark base and a white tip. But is it thick enough? And is it furred? Difficult to tell ... I had to wait for another visit to get confirmation if possible. No visits for a day or two and I cleaned the pond again (smelly) and disposed of the fragments of cane toad remaining.

In the meantime some nice daytime images of birds using the pond for drinks and baths.



***Daylight visitor to the murder scene, a Wompoo Fruit-dove (left).***

***Another bird species sets off the camera, Spotted Catbirds (right)***



Then another night visit but frustratingly limited photos, just a shot of inspection but partly hidden by foliage so still nothing definite...



A week later another visitor at 2:00 am this time, but the tail looks long and naked, not a Rakali, perhaps a White-tailed Rat.

I did record a few more images that were a little inconclusive and the story remains incomplete. Walking around in our rainforest I discovered a couple of natural waterholes in the base of buttressed trees and within these I also found eviscerated toad carcasses. But after April my frog pond was left alone. Maybe no toads were left? Maybe one of our owls ate the toad-killer? Some mysteries will remain, but I did enjoy the challenge and the nocturnal activity during our COVID19 lockdown. The camera also recorded quite a few bird species during the day and was triggered frequently by passing Red-legged Pademelons. The greatest number of camera triggers came from resident Brush-turkeys who used the pond as an aid to crossing the fence. It's interesting that I cannot now find any toads near our house so perhaps once they turn up I will set the camera up again.



In 2018, TKMG was the recipient of generous grant funding from the Wettenhall Environment Trust (formerly The Norman Wettenhall Foundation) to conduct surveys and review the conservation status of the northern spotted-tail quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus gracilis*).

Researcher and masters student, Jesse Rowland, recently published two papers based on that work which you can read here: <https://www.publish.csiro.au/AM/AM19017> , <https://www.publish.csiro.au/WR/WR19201>

At the time, the quoll surveys were an exciting collaboration with various stakeholders as well a unique volunteer opportunity for some of our members but even now, another two years down the track, that grant proves to be the gift that keeps on giving. The purchase of the trail cameras for the original survey work led to the establishment of a Critter Camera library for TKMG members and other conservation projects across the Tablelands. They are borrowed out on a monthly basis and have been up north to the cape for wallaby surveys, west on an NRM group fieldtrip, in the local primary and secondary schools on extension science projects, in local nature refuges as part of a feral pig control project and in backyards and forest blocks across the Atherton Tablelands. They are an incredible resource and popular engagement tool for our group and they would not have been possible without support from the Wettenhall Environment Trust.

## Photo-bombing Cassowaries and Pygmy Possums

by Renee and Wayne Young

As most members of the TKMG would know, we have a fantastic program where we can borrow a set of high-end camera traps to survey our properties and get a better idea just what's out there. Myself and my much better half (Renee) recently grabbed a set to take a look at some of the critters that also call our Butchers Creek property home.

I was nervous as a Butcher's thumb with the cameras, having had a series of less than successful experiences with them many (many...) years ago working as a consultant doing fauna surveys. Back then, these units were as dear as poison and as reliable as a politician. When they did actually work in the few hours before the

batteries went flat, the images were typically out of focus fuzzy pictures that could be anything between a cow's hoof and a Spinifex Hopping mouse, especially when taken at night.

I'm very glad to say that things have come a long way in the intervening years as the TKMG units were dead easy to set-up, install in the field and gave great results.

After some quick instruction while picking up the kit from Leanne and Paul, our first attempt that evening was at our compost heap, where we knew we'd get plenty of critters keen to jump in front of the lens. We thought we'd start small and just a single camera from the kit of five. As no trees were conveniently located for the camera, we drove a small stake into the ground about 1.5m from the pile, angled slightly down to have the camera point at the centre of the action. This also avoids branches waving in the wind (which can set the cameras off and result in hundreds of rather uninteresting leaf shots) and minimise the impact of the now heavy rainfall.

A run through the menu to check the settings looked good, flick the switch to capture and check the red light flashed on the front to confirm the trap was set... Maybe just a quick lean round the front to check to see the lens was free of raindrops and finger smudges and Flash – copped a double dose to the full LED white flash at close quarters. Must remember to delete that image from the card. Unlike many camera traps that have infrared LED flash systems for night images, the TKMG kits have a white flash. These give much better night time images and present true colours on the fauna, rather than trying to guess what colours might be in the green-grey infrared images.

A quick check the next morning on the camera trap showed that it worked like a charm. A late patrol of the compost heap by an Australian Brush Turkey and a Grey-Headed Robin, then the night shift took over with a series of visitors including White Tailed Rat, Melomys, a very small rodent (most likely house mouse) and even a cruising toad before the day shift took over again and the ever hopeful Brush Turkey's returned. Each image is stamped with the time taken and the ambient temperature.

With our confidence up we shifted the cameras to our rainforest, setting them in a variety of locations from more open forest floor to piles of fallen timber with more cover, hoping this would yield a better cross-section of images of the locals. We selected locations that had a small'ish tree nicely positioned on a spot that we wanted to trap and then used a fallen branch to lodge behind the top of the camera trap to ensure it pointed slightly downward. Check, set, red light flashes confirm it's ready to go and then a wave of a boot about the centre of our intended frame followed by the double LED flashes (having learnt now not to put my face there) made sure everything was set. We then sprinkled a couple of tablespoons of rolled oats rubbed with peanut butter to ensure some of the critters lingered in the right spot.



**White-tailed rat**



**Red-legged Pademelon**

Despite heavy rainfall the next few days while we left the traps out, we were very happy with the results. White-tailed Rats, Melomys, Grey-headed Robins, Chowchilla, Pale Yellow Robin, Brush Turkey, Red-Legged Pademelon, Musky Rat Kangaroo, Orange-footed Scrubfowl and Cassowary all made an appearance.



We come across the Cassowary while we were setting the camera traps so suspected that it would turn up on at least one of the cameras, but we were interested to later find that it went to four of the five camera traps to check them out. Not interested in the oat treats, it was just curious of this new and strange thing in its environment resulting in the photo-bombing images. It was also interesting to see the Cassowary turn up on some images at 7:30pm, well into the hours of darkness when we thought they would have parked-up not long after sunset.

**Left- Photo-bombing Cassowary**

Over the next week or two, we shifted the cameras about to check out different locations. We do wildlife rehab and had a Coppery Brushtail in a soft release cage in our replanted rainforest area, so we popped a camera trap in the nearby Euodia to check out when she was leaving the cage and returning each morning. This also revealed that she had multiple other visitors, including wild Coppery's, Melomys, House Mouse and most surprising of all a Pygmy Possum. We'd only had one brief and questionable sighting of these on our property before, so it was great to confirm their presence.



**Coppery Brushtail leaving soft release enclosure.**



We also have records of the Masked White-tailed Rat from our property. This suggested these were largely arboreal, so we tried the camera traps in a variety of trees with a variety of set-ups. While this did capture a range of critters in the trees, no Masked White-tailed turn-up so sets a challenge for next time.

**Left – Pygmy Possum**

We really encourage TKMG members to try the camera traps out. From just putting these on your deck to see what's going bump in the night to doing a broader survey of your property, they are great fun, easy to use and really show just what is out there in an unobtrusive way that causes very little stress to the wildlife – what more could you want!



**Right- a rare sighting of the Butchers Creek Yeti, Malanda erectus...**

## 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](mailto:tkmg.crittercams@gmail.com)

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

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## GLIDER GOS: Updates from Tumoulin and Gilbey Forests

by Peter Pattison, Jan Bode and Sally Day

Our **Tumoulin** volunteers have worked on a variety of tasks over recent months, such as monitoring feed trees for evidence of recent glider use, track maintenance, weed clearing from den and feed trees and even the occasional spotlighting session to confirm glider presence. One evening they were treated to a loud performance of glider vocalisations, at odds with the beautiful creatures' fluffy, 'cute' appearance! Many hours, over many days, were also spent removing string gridlines placed for scientific studies but, unfortunately not removed, creating a danger for wildlife. Perhaps there's a budding fibre artist just waiting for an opportunity to make a forest version of ghost net sculptures from the resulting large string haul.

In **Gilbey Forest**, the rapid growth and presence of lantana has far out-done our volunteer presence by a long 'shoot' in recent weeks. Rosemarie continues to clear lantana, not only from their private residence but also from many Glider related areas along Byers Road and within the Scientific reserve. The ground area that surrounds a big old Grandis den tree beside Byers Road has taken on a wonderful 'back to native' appearance with the absence of Lantana.

One day was spent confirming some GPS feed tree locations and re-tagging new and old trees. Data and photo collecting are ongoing as is the maintenance of our tracks. Glider activity is present.

*Photo from Geoff Spanner.  
A Striped Possum was also sighted on two occasions  
on an active cut on this same tree.*



**Thank you** to our yellow-bellied glider supporters for the generous donations of equipment that help volunteers in our monitoring and maintenance program, so vital for the ongoing health of this special glider population. Gloves, secateurs and lopping tools enable us to maintain access tracks and remove the build-up of lantana and other invasive weeds, thus preventing wildfire damage to den and feed trees. Ladders are another handy aid when attaching song meters to trees for additional monitoring, if somewhat cumbersome to carry through wet sclerophyll forest! As all gear gets heavy use in rough conditions, further donations are MOST WELCOME. If you're unable to give your time to the YBG Project, this is one, much appreciated way to help.

Please contact Amanda if you are interested in volunteering – [amandakaiwi@gmail.com](mailto:amandakaiwi@gmail.com)

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## Lucky to live with Lemuroids

by Jim Thomas, Tenkile Conservation Alliance

We moved to the Atherton Tablelands at the end of 2015 to be closer to Papua New Guinea (PNG) where we manage the Tenkile Conservation Alliance (TCA) [www.tenkile.com](http://www.tenkile.com) ...but also to escape the cold of our Victoria where we're originally from. Since Covid-19, we have been spending more time at home here in Australia. Getting to PNG has not been possible since March. We have, therefore, been able to spend much more time enjoying the natural wonders of the Atherton Tablelands.

Since we've been at home, we've gone on many walks near our house in the Maalan. Many of our walks have been along the Old Palmerston Highway (or Beatrice River Way as it will soon be renamed). We've had many interesting sightings of wildlife such as Blue-faced parrot finches, cassowaries, Lumholtz's tree-kangaroo and many other creatures. We often see Lemuroid ringtail possums when we go out spotlighting at night. They have a characteristic crashing through the bush – falling from higher to lower canopy. They are reasonably

common here at around 1000 metres. Many times we've encountered pairs, single animal and occasionally young animals.

It was an early (around 7:30am) morning in May, when Jean & I were walking along the road. Coming up to the TREAT/Massey Creek revegetation area, we were alerted to activity in a large tree. I'm not sure if our talking whilst walking disturbed the animals, but we saw three Lemuroid ringtail possums at perhaps 3 metres above the ground, scrambling in and around the fork of a tree that held a large staghorn fern. After a few minutes they realized that we posed no threat and slowly retreated back to their cover.

Such lovely looking animals. They reminded me of pygmy marmosets...only larger, bringing back memories from my zookeeper days. Lemuroid ringtail possums have quite a primate looking face and come across as being alert and interested in their surroundings. Makes you think how lucky we are to be living in a beautiful place where these animals still occur. Lemuroid possums have limitations as to what conditions they can live under and many scientists have predicted the demise of this species due to climate change. The status of Lemuroid Ringtail Possum is of real concern. Climate change certainly poses a worry for the long-term prospects for these little guys.

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## **New roadside signs to raise public awareness of tree-roo interactions**

by Leanne Hales

Tree-roo interactions are relatively common on the Atherton and Evelyn Tablelands but many people are surprisingly unaware of the iconic animals that share our home range, let alone our impacts on them as motorists, pet owners and sight-seers.

As a member of TKMG and resident of Figtree Close, where we have the incredible pleasure of sharing our rainforest home with Lumholtz's tree kangaroos, I understand the likelihood of encountering a tree roo (or possum, bandicoot and other local wildlife) on Tablelands roads. Some mornings the 3km drive down Lake Barrine Road from home to school can be a heartbreaking display of last night's roadkill victims.

Recently I was driving across to Atherton when a tree-roo shot out of the scrub at Nicholas Creek and bounded across the bitumen in front of me into an open paddock on the other side. I was travelling under the speed-limit but nevertheless distracted by mental list-making. Thankfully I was able to brake safely and avoid a collision, but it was a near miss that gave me a very important wake-up call.

**TKMG has recently launched a series of roadside signs to alert local and tourist traffic of road incidents, dog attacks and sightings in an effort to raise public awareness and encourage more fauna-friendly behaviour.**

Similar to the familiar "Recent Crossing" Cassowary signs, the TKMG signs have been designed as a temporary notification of tree-roo "hot spots" and the need for motorists to slow down while driving through known habitat. Dog owners are also encouraged to walk their pets on a leash as dog attacks on tree roos are far too common and often fatal.



We have concerned, local Mum, Kirsten Pearce, to thank for the eye-catching designs as well as TRC and the Natural Asset Management Network (NAMaN) for supporting this initiative.

The roadside signage project will be reviewed after 12 months and your feedback is welcome at any time so...Keep an eye out for the signs...and for our treasured local wildlife.

**To report a tree roo interaction please email [info@tree-kangaroo.net](mailto:info@tree-kangaroo.net) with details of the location, type of interaction and your contact number so that we can coordinate installation of the signage.**

**For vehicle incidents and dog attacks, please text or ring Amy Shima on 0499 180 961**



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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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