



Mammal Mail

January 2010

Newsletter of the Tree-Kangaroo & Mammal Group Inc.

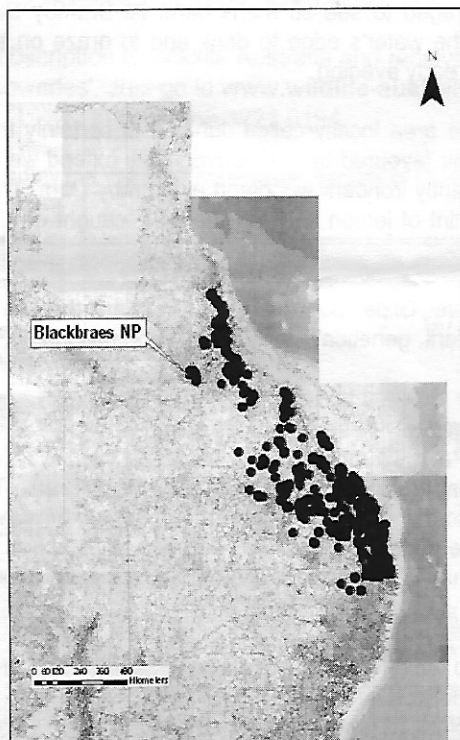
Welcome to a quick January (belated December) newsletter. The planned bumper edition has been thwarted by technical problems so many apologies. We are looking forward to a brand new year with our members & readers would like to wish you all a safe & happy 2010.

BLACKBRAES' GREATER GLIDERS

by: John Winter 2009

In the October edition of *Mammal Mail*, Rupert Russell gave a detailed account of a trip to Blackbraes National Park to make barbed-wire fences less lethal to gliders. My wife, Helen Myles, and I went along as part of the volunteer group accompanying Rupert. It was a trip I had wanted to do for many years because of the Park's reputation as a haven for gliders and possums. Here, I want to say something about this very unusual population of the Greater Gliders we saw at Blackbraes.

Biologists first became aware of the gliders as a result of some early environmental modelling by Henry Nix, Australian National University, when he identified the high plateau at the southern end of the Gilbert Range as worth visiting. The sandstone plateau is 1000 m in altitude, standing well above the surrounding country side. As a result of this modelling Steven Garnett and Andrew Taplin, both living in Townsville at the time, visited the area in the mid 1980s and much to their surprise recorded numerous Greater Gliders.



Greater Glider (dots) distribution in Queensland and Blackbraes area

It is an unusual population for a number of reasons. One, it is the most westerly population in Queensland (see maps). Two, and of greater interest, it appears to be an isolated population, separated from other more coastal populations by many kilometres. The nearest record to the east is from the eastern end of the Great Basalt Wall National Park, near Charters Towers, a distance of 140 kilometres. To the north the nearest records are at Undarra National Park, also a distance of 140 kilometres. None of these records are recent; the Basalt Wall one was recorded in 1981 and the Undarra ones in 1973. Peter Dwyer and I spotlighted two on 28 April 1979, at 100 Mile Swamp, and Keith McDonald collected one for the Queensland Museum in 1989. Val Speedie was the naturalist at the Undarra Resort in the 1990s and from 1991 to 1993 she would regularly see Greater Gliders, but after 1993 the gliders seemed to have gone from the area. However, that is another story.

Another amazing feature of the glider population at Blackbraes was the number of gliders we encountered - the trees were alive with them. On our first night spotlighting we set off in and on the Hilux to spotlight for my standard five kilometre transect, but never finished it. We had barely started when Conrad Russell sang out, "There's one". So we duly stopped and recorded its height in the tree, species of tree and how far from the vehicle it was. Off we went again. Helen, who was driving had no time to change gear when the call was "There's another one". This continued unabated with sometimes two gliders seen in a single tree, a not very common sight elsewhere, and at times up to four gliders could be seen at one stop. We were so overwhelmed by gliders that in two kilometres our tally was 37 Greater Gliders, 20 in Lemon-scented Gums and 10 in ironbarks. By then it was nearly ten o'clock and we decided to call it quits for the night because Rupert was working us hard next day - so much for the five kilometre transect.

The next night we headed in the opposite direction and managed to complete three kilometres to give us a total of five kilometres for the two nights. Not quite as many gliders were seen on the second night, 23 in slightly lower forest and one Sugar Glider. Still, a total of 60 Greater Gliders was an amazingly high number, the highest number I have ever come across in North Queensland. The next highest population I have encountered was at Taravale, now an Australia Wildlife Conservancy property west of Paluma.

At Blackbraes we shifted camp to Brumby Dam and in our one night of spotlighting we managed five kilometres, through a slightly shorter and more open forest mostly of ironbarks with a scattering of Lemon-scented Gums. Here our - Helen, Rupert, Etsuko, Laurie and I - tally comprised mostly Common Brushtail Possums (14) with fewer Greater Gliders (9) seven of which were in Lemon-scented Gums. The brushtails appeared to favour ironbarks with seven sightings, and four in Lemon-scented Gums. Other mammals seen were a Rufous Bettong, a Grey Kangaroo and a Common Wallaroo. We also saw a pair of small bettong-sized macropods that I tried to make into Spectacled Hare-wallabies, but despite Rupert following them on foot for several hundred metres, their identification eluded us. With my interest in Common Brushtail Possums on Cape York Peninsula and in the eucalypt woodland in western North Queensland, where they seem to be loosing ground, I was encouraged to see so many here. At Brumby Dam itself Rufous Bettongs were numerous and came down to the water's edge to drink and to graze on the short green grass. Joan Dilger counted 13 at one time in the early evening.

The very tall woodland on the sandstone plateau, the area locally called Juntala, is certainly the prime habitat for the gliders and the Lemon-scented Gum their favoured tree. However, they extend well beyond this type of forest, because they were in the predominantly ironbark woodland at Brumby Dam. They were also in pure stands of ironbark woodland, with not a hint of lemon scent in the air - caught on the fence along the northern boundary of the park

The obvious questions regarding the Blackbraes' Greater Glider population are; first, are they an isolated population and secondly, if they are isolated, how different, genetically, ecologically, behaviourally, are they from the more coastal populations?

With regard to their distribution two approaches are needed. First is to determine how far the Blackbraes population extends beyond the limits of the National Park. To date the only records I have tracked down outside the park are a few in the vicinity of the Hughenden Road as far south as Poison Creek. The high sandstone plateau of the Gilbert Range extends well to the west and south of the National Park and one would expect the gliders to also occur further along the plateau. Secondly, we need to establish just how isolated the population is. Perhaps the big gap on the map is merely because no one has looked for them in the intervening area.

So the challenge to Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group members is to go forth and look for Greater Gliders out west. If you do see them please record, where (preferably with a GPS), in what type of woodland, when and who by and send the record to me at jw.winter@bigpond.com or phone 4097 0048. Any photograph, no matter how small the glider might appear, would be a great back-up for the record.

News News News News News

GIFT FROM QPS of QLD

Many thanks to the team at Wildlife Preservation Society of Qld for their kind donation of information resources, magazines, & pamphlets. We will be using these for competition prizes & members & readers. We have inserted a fact sheet and information leaflet with this December edition.

For more information just visit www.Wildlife.org.au

TKMG MEMBERSHIPS DUE

Remember if your MM label says 09 then you are out of date & need to renew your membership. Visit our web site or join us at the next meeting to update your membership fees.

ROOM FOR YOUR VIEW

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Write in and give us your point of view on matters that concern the Tree-Kangaroos or other mammals

PUBLIC MEETINGS

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Public meetings will resume in March 2010.



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Where can I buy that TKMG gear?

Crew & polo T-shirts, brightly coloured kiddies T's and caps, books, shopping bags, postcards, cards, fridge magnets, posters and TKMG CDs

can all be purchased from our public meetings and the Yungaburra Markets..

Also look for our products in the Ravenshoe & Malanda Falls Visitors Centres, Yungaburra Visitors Centre, shopping bags in the Eacham Medical Centre and the Malanda Fairy Shop, T-shirts in the TREAT Interp. Centre and at the Tree Kangaroo Café you will find CDs & postcards

If the outlets have run out or for any merchandising enquiries?

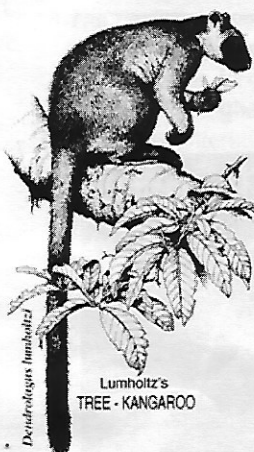
Ring Jack Grant on 0410810427

What's On?

**Public meetings will
resume in March
2010**



e-kangaroo, Malanda Falls Photo by Colleen Creaney
Send in your Mammal Photo for this spot



Drawing by William Cooper

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10ewsletter of the Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group Inc.
PO Box 1409, Atherton, Q, 4883

Please post to:



Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group Inc (TKMG)

E-mail: info@tree-kangaroo.net

Web site: www.tree-kangaroo.net

President: Jack Grant 0410810427
ptiloris@yahoo.com.au

V. President: Lee Beechen 0439 540948
Lee.woma@gmail.com

Treasurer: Larry Crook (07) 4096 8243
freebrook@austarnet.com.au

Secretary: Ian Sinclair (07) 4096 6690
iroesinclair@bigpond.com

Newsletter: Lee Beechen 0439 540948 Lee.woma@gmail.com