



Pioneer Catchment & Landcare News

April 2010

PCL hopes all its members and friends across the region have remained safe during the events of Cyclone Ului, and reminds everyone to remain safe during the clean-up activities.

Come and Conserve Slade Point Reserve!

What: Monthly community working bees at Slade Pt Reserve

When: Commencing April 24, 3pm-5pm.

Where: Meet at the Teal Street entrance of the reserve (east end of Teal St)

Wear: protective clothing, mosquito repellent, gloves (we will supply extras)

Who: Everyone is welcome – bring the kids, or tell a friend...

Contact: Tessa McDonald on 4944 1979

You are invited to monthly working bees in the Slade Point Reserve to be held over the coming year. The Reserve is a very special place, and many readers will have explored it as a child or visited more recently. It is a valuable asset to the community, for its beauty, recreational opportunities and the variety of vegetation types and animals contained within.

Working bees will tackle a variety of tasks, including removing weed species, maintaining signboards, planting local native trees, collecting native seeds and more. They build on the hard work done over many years by the Friends of the Reserve group and others. The working bees fit within a wider plan of work coordinated by the Reserve's Advisory Committee, which includes representatives from Mackay Regional Council and Queensland Parks and Wildlife.

So come along and help conserve your Reserve – it's a good excuse to get some exercise, contribute to our community, and to do something for the environment!

Working bees supported by Pioneer Catchment & Landcare Group through funding from the Australian Government's Caring for Country.



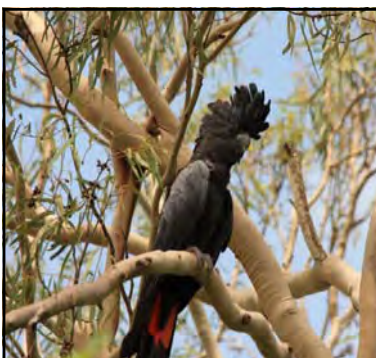
Come and get involved in your local Reserve!
Photo: T McDonald

Creating Habitat from Cyclone Ului

By Hayley Glover



Raptors perch on exposed branches to survey the land for prey (above). Red-tailed Black Cockatoos are dependent on hollows to safely raise young (below).



Whilst we are busy repairing homes, cleaning up backyards and surveying the damage caused by Cyclone Ului, it is easy to become sombre at the damage caused. In particular, we are saddened by the falling of some beautifully aged trees in the area. However, cyclones represent a disturbance event just like floods and fires, that help shape the current environment and are essential to ecosystem functioning by creating new habitat.

Disturbance events do result in direct mortality to some species and increase the vulnerability of other species, however, they also offer the chance for other species to thrive. For example, the loss of tree limbs creates an opportunity for new habitats. In farming areas, exposed limbs can be used by raptor species as perches for hunting snakes and rats. Fallen limbs further create habitat for reptiles such as lizards, skinks and geckos who are often seen scurrying from one branch or log to another hunting cockroaches and other insects. Without such protective cover, these species could fall prey to their predators. Tree hollows are particularly crucial for species to nest and rear their young in. Over 300 species of Australian native animals use tree hollows at some stage of their life cycle and broken limbs from disturbance events are crucial in the process of creating hollows.

The retention of a diversity of habitat types plays an important role in ensuring our native wildlife can recover quickly from such natural disasters. So, by shifting our perception of the damage caused by the cyclone to one of opportunity for new habitats we can help our native wildlife. Safety should always be top priority. However before removing fallen limbs or hollowed out trees, consider what the tree is offering the biodiversity of your property.



Skinks (*Carlia* species, above) use fallen logs for a variety of uses: to forage and as protection from predators. Photos: H Glover

Plant of the Month

Red Kamala / *Mallotus philippensis*

Have you got a Red Kamala at your place? This fast-growing species is found from suburban backyards to bush blocks around our region. To spot, look for its characteristic red seed capsules, which may be on trees now....

LEAVES: Simple, alternate, ovate, long stemmed, 6-20cm long, tapering to a point at the apex. They are dark green above and dull beneath with numerous tiny red glands and whitish hairs. Venation is raised on the underside with three distinct basal veins.

FLOWER/FRUIT: Brownish flowers are borne on short spikes. Female flowers are followed by three lobed capsules, with a dark red, powdery covering. The dehiscent capsules mature during autumn and contains three black seeds.

PROPAGATION: Fresh seed.

LOCAL HABITAT: Dry rainforest, littoral rainforest and often common in regrowth.

DISTRIBUTION: Eastern Australia from North Queensland to Northern New South Wales. Also Papua and Eastern Asia.

GENERAL: A golden-red dye for silk can be made from the red powdery covering of the fruits. A fast growing dense plant useful for windbreaks or screening. The timber has been used for flooring. A bug, bright red in colour, is often found in large tight clusters and has been observed eating the covering of the fruit.

Source: PCL Plant Information Sheets.



Photos: S&A Pearson



Pond Apple Field Day—Wrap Up

Over 10 hearty souls braved the wet conditions and took time out from cyclone clean-up to attend the Pond Apple Field Day on 25.03.10. Participants saw first hand the challenges of identifying Pond Apple, which to many of us seemed to fit right in with riparian vegetation. Tips for identifying Pond Apple included looking for:

- yellow leaves, particularly in the dry season,
- characteristic fruit, that turn from green to yellow on the tree and black on the ground, and
- swollen or thickened bases of the Pond Apple stems.

Pond Apple control treatment methods were discussed and demonstrated. For creek lines, cutting and pasting with a frog-friendly glyphosate was recommended as the most effective option. Some mechanical options being trialled in the North, for extensive infestations, were also detailed.

Katie Patane and Steve Setter from the Tropical Weeds Research Centre (South Johnstone) were on hand to discuss their research on Pond Apple. One interesting point was that water is the main dispersal agent for Pond Apple. Fruit and seeds float downstream, eventually exiting the river mouth where they are dispersed by marine currents. Dispersion is largely driven by prevailing winds, with most seeds beaching within a few months and within 100km of the river mouth. In cyclonic conditions seeds can be transported up to 1300kms. This is of concern as seeds are still able to germinate after spending 3 years in salt water, or more than 2 years in fresh water. Overland, the main dispersal agent is animals eating fruit and dispersing the seeds. Pigs are the main culprit and a single pig scat can contain up to 288 Pond Apple seeds – another good reason to control pigs in your area!

The identification of Pond Apple in Habana demonstrates the vital role that landholders play in land management. In this case, the threat to this region from a very invasive Weed of National Significance has been identified thanks to land managers taking samples of Pond Apple fruit into the DPI office to ensure that they were not poisonous to cattle. This early identification should enable control of the infestation before it takes over extensive tracts of land, as they have done in the Wet Tropics, or, spread to other catchments. This example also demonstrates the help available through the DPI for weed identification and advice.



Pond Apple Field Day at Habana

Photo: T McDonald

Thank you to participants and presenters at the Pond Apple Field Day. For your copy of the Pond Apple information pack, contact PCL.

Committee Member Profile — Cr Karen May

The Management Committee this month bids farewell to valued Committee member Councillor Karen May. Karen has recently adopted a new Council portfolio—Community Services and Facilities. Councillor May has been a member of the Management Committee since May 2008.

Cr. May has 8 years previous local government experience as a Councillor, Deputy Mayor and Mayor at Sarina Shire Council. Cr May holds a number of positions with various community organisations and is the Patron of the Sarina Historical Centre and Scope Club of Sarina.

Cr. May's contributions during her time on the PCL Management Committee have been invaluable to the Group, and we wish Karen all the best with her new portfolio.

Cr. May will be replaced by Cr. George Christensen, who now holds the Parks and Natural Environment portfolio.



Photo: Mackay Regional Council

Changing Outfits at St. Helens

By Hayley Glover

I recently travelled up to St. Helens Beach to participate in Queensland Wader Studies Group (QWSG) monthly shorebird count. Upon arrival, I found the usual suspects along the beach: Pied Oystercatchers, Bar-tailed Godwits, Whimbrel and Masked Lapwings. Further down the beach I was struck by a few individuals that certainly tested my skills on shorebird identification. Two migratory shorebird species were in their partial and full breeding plumage!

Why did this make the birds difficult to identify? Migratory shorebirds obtain different plumages through periodic moults (shedding of feathers). Most of their time in Australia (Sept - April) they are in their non-breeding plumage, which is rather bland. The two species photographed here, the Bar-tailed Godwit and the Great Knot, are usually found in their non-breeding plumage that is roughly brown-greyish above and white to light-grey underneath. Around February, migratory species begin to develop their breeding plumage by replacing most or all of their body feathers, with some of these changes being quite dramatic. The Bar-tailed Godwit photographed here is developing rufous-coloured underparts, and the great knot in partial breeding plumage with scapulars (upper wings) chestnut with black fringes.

What further confused me was the knowledge that they may be slightly heavier than when I last may have seen them. Migratory shorebirds gain an astronomical amount of weight prior to migration. The Great Knot, for example, can increase its weight by 72% from its mid-season to its departure weight! Other changes they undergo include an increase in their flight muscles whilst their leg muscles decrease, growth of their heart to increase oxygen supply and thickening of their blood. These really are amazing transformations that their little bodies undergo in order to complete this mammoth journey, and for a very brief period of the year, we are able to witness them.

If anyone is interested in participating in shorebird counts in the region, or would like more information about shorebirds, please contact the Queensland Wader Studies Group by going to the Birds Queensland website (<http://www.birdsqueensland.org.au>) and following the links.

(Apologies to readers who receive the newsletter in black and white photocopy—to download a colour version, visit our website www.pioneercatchment.org.au)



As Bar-tailed Godwits (above and below, centre) develop breeding plumage, their underparts become rufous. Chestnut-coloured scapulars on these Great Knots (below, right) indicate partial breeding plumage.



Shorebirds at St. Helens Beach in partial and full breeding plumage. Photos: H Glover

Who's who in Pioneer Catchment & Landcare?

Management Committee

Chair Margaret Lane

Deputy Chair Dave Hunter

Treasurer Joan Fitzsimmons

Secretary (Non voting) Tessa McDonald

Committee Members

Irene Champion

Cr. Wendy Cameron

Wendy Eiteneuer

Cr. Karen May

Dianne Williams

Coordinator Tessa McDonald
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Newsletter Tessa McDonald, Hayley Glover

Upcoming Events April

Saturday 10, 8am—Morag McNichol Reserve working bee. Contact Jim McNichol on 4942 8802 for details.

Saturday 24, 3-5pm—Slade Point Reserve community working bee, meet Teal St entrance to reserve. Contact Tessa McDonald on 4944 1979 for details.

Friday 30th April—Monday 3rd May— Wintermoon Festival, Cameron's Pocket. www.wintermoonfestival.com

May

Sunday 2, 6:30am—MACBOCA excursion to Sandringham Conservation Reserve. Meet at Tourist Information Centre. Contact Marj Andrews on 4952 2964 for details.

Saturday 8, 8am—Morag McNichol Reserve working bee. Contact Jim McNichol on 4942 8802 for details.

Saturday 15, 3-5pm—Slade Point Reserve community working bee. Contact Tessa McDonald on 4944 1979 for details.

Sunday 16—Palm & Cycad Fete, Farleigh Sugar Mill, Bruce Hwy.

Thursday 20—Friday 21—BSES Field Days.

Saturday 29, 2-4pm—Cat's Claw Creeper community working bee & BBQ at Reliance Creek National Park. Contact Tessa McDonald on 4944 1979 for details.

Volunteering and Opportunities

Upcoming Events with Conservation Volunteers Australia

To volunteer on any of the projects shown below or for more information, contact the office on 4951 0933 or email mackay@conservationvolunteers.com.au

April

6 – 9- Blacks Beach Spit.

12–15- Hay Pt Foreshore & Beach Clean Up.

16- Alligator Creek School Nursery.

19 – 25- Slade Pt Reserve.

May

3 – 7- Louisa Creek Reserve.

10 – 14- Slade Pt Reserve.

National Green Jobs Corp Training Opportunity

Training and Work Experience Opportunity for 17 - 24 year olds.

Vacancies available in teams from Mackay and Sarina. Team from Mackay will be working on a project at De Moleyan's Lagoon near Marian. Partnering with DPI&F, the project is centred on rehabilitating the wetland through activities such as fencing, planting, weeding, refuse removal and seed collection.

Supported by:



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