



Pioneer Catchment & Landcare News

February 2010

PCL Project Update

In November and December last year, PCL completed five information events at boat ramps in our catchment. These events were part of Reef Catchments Mackay Whitsunday's "Island Community Taskforce" Project. Thanks to everyone who took part in the surveys, and congratulations to Chris Davey who won the \$100 boating store voucher. In addition to ongoing projects, PCL will work in local Reserves on two new projects, starting early 2010:

- **Slade Point Reserve Project:** PCL will hold monthly community working bees and school activity sessions in this ecologically-significant Reserve. This project builds on and maintains work done by the community over many years, and is funded by a Federal Government 'Caring for Our Country' grant. Working bees begin in March—keep watching for details!
- **Sandfly Creek Reserve:** As part of a larger Conservation Volunteers Australia project, PCL will hold educational activities for local schools. Students will learn about the significance of Sandfly Creek including shorebird conservation and the impact of disturbance on shorebirds.



We also have a spectacular new PCL plaque hanging in the office, created and installed by Gerard Masters. **Thanks Gerard!**

Special Visitors from Alaska & Siberia

by Hayley Glover

About 2 million shorebirds migrate to Australia each year with the Mackay region fortunate enough to welcome around 21,000 shorebirds. Migratory shorebirds start arriving in the region towards the end of August, with peak arrivals occurring during October. Sandfly Creek Reserve provides an excellent opportunity to view shorebirds in the Mackay area.

Shorebirds can be classified into two groups: "residents", who reside in Australia year-round and "migrants" who spend only a portion of the year in Australia and migrate to breed overseas. Both groups are found along shorelines of tidal estuaries, wetlands and on occasion, inland. In general, their appearance can be described as long legs, pointed beaks and long pointed wings. Migrant birds in Australia can be particularly challenging to identify as they are in their non-breeding plumage, which can give them very few identifying features.

The first challenge in identifying shorebirds is picking up different features between species. Many species are similar and cannot be distinguished by colour, patterns, weight or habitat. For example, although shorebirds are commonly found along shorelines, many species are often found inland (eg. Masked lapwing, bush stone-curlew). In addition, a bird's size can vary between first arrival and departure. As a first step, use the guide to the right to familiarise yourself with common shapes and sizes of shorebirds found in the Sandfly Creek Reserve. Take this guide when you go birding and use it to match body shapes with the birds you see, and this will narrow your species options down.

Be careful to keep your distance between shorebirds and yourself. Keep a minimum distance of 150-200m between yourself and the bird, this minimises the chance of disturbance whilst they are busily feeding. Remember, you only have a few more months to see the migrants here as most will head off in February and March. So, happy birding!



Eastern Curlew



Whimbrel



Black-winged Stilt

Bush Stone-curlew
Beach Stone-curlew



Common Sandpiper

Curlew Sandpiper

Greenshank

Marsh Sandpiper

Red-necked Stint

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper

Terek Sandpiper

Broad-billed Sandpiper



Double-banded Plover

Greater Sand Plover

Pacific Golden Plover

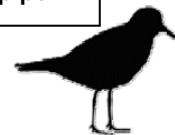
Lesser Sand Plover

Masked Lapwing

Red-kneed dotterel

Red-capped Plover

Grey Plover



Grey-tailed Tattler

Great Knot

Red Knot

Ruddy Turnstone



Pied Oystercatcher

Sooty Oystercatcher



Bar-tailed Godwit

Black-tailed Godwit

Images: Hunter Wetlands Centre
Australia. www.wetlands.org.au

Plant of the Month

Brown Birch / Flintwood *Scolopia braunii*

A distinctive feature of this attractive plant is the bright pink to red colouring of its new growth which is on show now.

Description: Large bushy shrub to small tree, with a dense rounded crown and slightly scaly brown bark. Smooth alternate leaves, from 4-7.5cm long, vary from diamond-shaped with 2-6 angled margins in younger plants, to elliptic with almost entire margins on more mature trees. The leaves are fairly stiff, dark shiny green above and dull beneath.

Small, white-cream and perfumed flowers with showy stamens, borne in short axillary sprays. Small yellow-red-black fleshy fruits with a hooked style, about 1cm in diameter, contain a number of seeds embedded in pulp. Glossy leaves and bright new growth make this an attractive ornamental which is fast growing, hardy and adaptable.

Distribution: *Scolopia braunii* occurs in a variety of rainforest community types including riverine and littoral forests, where it is very common in this area.

Source: Champion, I. and Alcock, H. (1989) One Hundred and One Trees of Mackay, The Mackay Branch of Society for Growing Australian Plants.



Images: S & A Pearson

Weed of the Month

Easter Cassia *Senna pendula* var. *glabrata*

Easter cassia is a successful invader of disturbed or modified sites. It has been observed to establish in sunny openings and then scramble over the adjacent vegetation, often into the canopy layer of even rain forest. It is frequently seen in our region along roadsides and on the banks of waterways.

Description:

This weed grows as a shrub to about 5m tall, and may scramble up trees. Stems often grow in a zigzag pattern and may be sparsely hairy. Leaves grow in alternate formation, and are pinnate with 3-6 pairs of leaflets. The top side of the leaf stalk has a gland between the lowermost leaflets. Around Easter it produces masses of bright yellow flowers. Flowering is followed by hundreds of brown, slender seed pods up to 12cm long and each containing 5-10 seeds.



Image: S & A Pearson



Image: E Weislo

Management:

Small individual plants can be removed by hand pulling, particularly in moist soil. Take care to remove the roots and consider applying mulch to discourage regrowth. Larger individuals may be dug out with a mattock or similar garden tool. Once again, the whole crown must be removed for the achievement of long term control. This approach may be deemed too labour intensive for more established individual plants or for larger infestations. Cut and paste and basal barking are also effective—refer to the QPI&F Fact Sheet for details.

Source: QPI&F Fact Sheets



Image: T McDonald



PCL Plant information sheets

Did you know that PCL has a series of 49 fact sheets about local native plants? We are happy to send you a copy of all the sheets on a CD in return for a gold coin donation to cover materials costs. For your copy, please contact the office.

Welcome to the new Management Committee

by Margaret Lane

This year's Management Committee is made up of 8 dedicated volunteers. Together, these people will steer the strategic direction of our Group and, both as a group and individually, they contribute much to community-based natural resource management in our region. I wish to thank last year's committee members for their contribution and welcome the new committee to what will be an interesting and challenging year.

Many of our readers may not know our Management Committee members, so over the next few newsletters we will introduce them to you.

Committee Member Profile—Dave Hunter

Dave, together with wife Janet, produces delicious organic bananas on his Cameron's Pocket property. Dave is passionate about Landcare and sustainable agriculture, and was a 2008 Landcare Primary Producer Awards finalist. The Hunters were involved in the Sustainable Landscapes Program doing revegetation and biodiversity projects. They have been producing compost for on-farm use since 2002. Dave is also involved in developing composting activities in our region as a way to enhance soil carbon and nutrients, boost agricultural productivity, and solve organic waste problems. Dave has been a Committee Member for a number of years.



Committee members L-R: Cr. Wendy Cameron, Irene Champion, Margaret Lane, Dave Hunter, Di Williams and Wendy Eiteneuer. Absent: Joan Fitzsimmons and Cr. Karen May Photo: T McDonald

Strange and smelly fruits appear in the Botanic Gardens... are they at your place too?

by Maya Harrison, Visitor Services Officer, Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens

February is fabulous for Fungi...

Mysterious objects are appearing with almost magical speed of growth intriguing us with their colours, shapes and smells. The strange things popping up in the gardens and lawns here at the Botanic Gardens are the fruiting bodies of Fungi.

Fungi vary in size from microscopic yeasts and moulds to bracket fungi a metre or more in width. In their method of growth, feeding and reproduction, fungi are different from all other plants. Fungi have a complete lack of the green pigment called Chlorophyll and they reproduce by spores, not seeds. As much as we might not like the weather conditions at the moment, for Fungi the combination of humidity, temperature and the kind of soil they are in is just right for them to produce spores to germinate.

Mushrooms, toadstools, stinkhorns and other strange shaped growths are 'fruits', just like an apple is the fruit of the apple tree. These strange 'fruits' sole function is to produce spores and they have many variations in how they achieve this and then have them dispersed.

Mushrooms that look like umbrellas have their spores in the flaps of tissues (gills) under the cap. Stinkhorns, which seem to have hatched from eggs in the soil are so named because of the foul odour that oozes from the moist brown cap. The odour, similar to rotting meat entices flies and insects to land and walk on them and thus spread the spores with their feet. Puffballs disperse thousands of spores at once as their thick skin breaks and explodes.

Visiting the Botanic Gardens during our damp weather, you will see many varieties of Fungi, including stinkhorns. All you need to do is follow your nose...

Book a free guided walk with Maya by calling Gardens Administration on 4952 7300 or email botanic@mackay.qld.gov.au.



Images: M Harrison

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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Project Officer Hayley Glover
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Newsletter Tessa McDonald, Nicola Craig,
Hayley Glover

Supported by:



Upcoming Events

February

Sunday 7, 5.45am — MACBOCA excursion to Mt Charlton Reserve. Meet at Mobil Service Station Coningsby. Contact Marj Andrews on 4952 2964 for details.

Monday 8 to Friday 12 – Volunteer with Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) on the Shoal Point foreshore. Contact CVA on 4951 0933 for details.

Sunday 28, from 10am — CVA Sandfly Creek Reserve Project Launch and Tree Planting Day, Sandfly Creek Reserve. Contact CVA on 4951 0933 for details.

March

Thursday 4, from 8pm — SGAP Monthly Meeting, Mackay Gem and Craft Society Hall, Leisure Court. Visitors welcome.

Saturday 6, 8am—Morag McNichol Reserve working bee. Contact Jim McNichol on 49428 802 for details.

Sunday 7, from 5.45am—MACBOCA excursion to Rocky Dam Creek. Meet at the Mackay Tourist Information Centre. Contact Marj Andrews on 4952 2964 for details.

Sunday 7, 8am-10am—Clean Up Australia Day with Pioneer Catchment and Landcare Group. Site: Riverside Drive opposite Mackay North Pony Club. RSVP on 4944 1979.

Tuesday 16-Thursday 18—On-farm Composting Workshop, location to be confirmed. For more details contact John Ross on 4954 1289.

Friday 19, 10am-12noon— PCL General Meeting, all welcome. Guest speaker Cr. Karen May will discuss Mackay Regional Council's sustainability program. Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens meeting room (back of information centre, Lagoon St).



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