



## Trees for the Evelyn and Atherton Tablelands Inc

The right tree in the right place for the right reason

# TREAT

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## TREAT Newsletter Spring September - November 2002

### BRICMA Launches community survey of platypus sightings

The Barron River Integrated Catchment Management Association (BRICMA) is a non-profit community group funded by the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT). It provides assistance with on-ground river restoration projects within the Barron River Catchment. The office is based at the Natural Resources & Mines in Mareeba and project operate throughout the catchment.

One of the projects BRICMA is currently running is called Project Platypus - Barron River. This project uses the iconic platypus to engage the community in environmental sustainability. The focus of Project Platypus is to provide good land and water management for the needs of both the people and the platypus.

Last year a community survey of platypus sightings was carried out by BRICMA to find out exactly where platypus are found here in the Barron River Catchment. Thanks to the public, 283 sightings were recorded and a map has now been produced (which can be obtained from BRICMA). Most of the sightings occurred around Malanda, Yungaburra, Atherton and Kuranda. Not so many sightings were recorded in the Mareeba or Freshwater/ Redlynch areas, so if anyone has seen any platypus there, we are still interested in recording your results.

Some of the interesting stories sent to us include:

- Platypus have been found wandering along roads, including the Peterson Creek bridge at Yungaburra, perhaps that little platypus had heard about the Viewing Platform and wanted to have a look at his platypus mates from above!
- Dave from Millaa Millaa wrote: "I saw at 8pm night time, a platypus crossing a walking track approximately 300m from the creek. I was dumbfounded and no one would believe me!"
- Another platypus was seen enjoying a jaunt out to water: "We saw one platypus in our garden bed about one year ago. It is a native garden plot, and at the time it was waterlogged" (Brian from Scrubby Creek).
- 1-3 platypus have been regularly seen swimming through the water weed in the actual Crater at Mt Hypipamee National Park theories abound as to how they got there.
- Darryl described a lovely experience: "I often used to swim with the platypus there, and see them from underwater. Once, a platypus swam right up to me and appeared in front of my face looking at me!"

An ideal breeding site for the platypus is a stable stream bank with healthy riparian vegetation - the tree, shrub and grass roots help stabilise the banks and protect their burrows. Although sightings can be sighted in actively eroding banks, they're likely to be travelling from their burrows to feed. Impacts upon platypus include increasing erosion, decline of water quality, loss of riparian vegetation, pressure of feral animals, litter being washed into waterways, water pumps, fishing lines and equipment, reduced or seasonally altered rivers and stream flows.

Stage two of Project Platypus is landholder involvement which is now well under way. National Heritage Trust funding has been granted to help improve habitat for platypus, tree kangaroos and other fauna in the upper reaches of Leslie Creek, which is an important tributary of the Barron River and a priority area for rehabilitation. The funding will assist eleven landholders on five properties to rehabilitate 1.5km of creek, with particular attention to weed control, revegetation and fencing. An Envirofund application has been recently submitted for funds for an additional four landholders to plant over 6000 trees in the upper reaches of the Barron River. If you are interested in re-vegetating the waterways on your property (within the Barron River Catchment), or would like further information on platypus or any other catchment issue, please contact BRICMA and you will find Jane Greer and Helen Adams will be only too happy to help, phone 4048 4748.

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### A Tribute to Nganggabana (George Davis)

A historical loss to the Tablelands and the Wet Tropics region occurred at 2:20 pm on Saturday 21 September 2002, when George Davis (Nganggabana), the last fluent speaker of Tableland Yidiny language, died at 79 years old.

Born December, 1922 in the shelter of buttress roots of a Blush Alder tree (*Sloanea australis*) at Gadgarra, he was raised by his grandfather at Goldsborough and Toohey's Creek. At times during his childhood, his grandfather would have to flee into the forest with him to prevent the police from taking George away. During these times George lived a traditional life style with his family and his clan, the Malanbarra of the Mulgrave River.

He was an old boy of Bulcher's Creek School and North Johnstone School. He started working at 18 years and gained experience in dairy farm work, timber cutting, striker and yardman for a blacksmith, sugar cane cutting, managing a sugar farm, a sawmill hand and a tallow boilerman. Mostly he worked in timber cutting, alternating seasonally with sugar cane cutting. He married Grace Mary Ambrum in 1948 and produced a son John and three daughters, Lilian, Lorraine and Kayleen. All three daughters are alive today. He had recently remarried but the marriage was short lived.

Nganggabana met Bob Dixon, an Aboriginal language Linguist in 1974 and made considerable contributions to written knowledge of Tableland Yidiny language, traditional skills, lore and beliefs. George wanted to communicate his knowledge so that it could be available to his descendants, clan members and the wider community. He conveyed knowledge to linguists, anthropologists, ecologists, herpetologists, students, community groups, and school children. He took many groups as well as his family down the sacred trail along Toohey's Creek from Gadgarra to Goldsborough in the Mulgrave River Valley. He also advised fellow Aboriginals, participated in Aboriginal community groups, Aboriginal politics and the reconciliation movement. He was a skilled teacher and artisan in traditional Yidiny craft and revived the traditional shield of the Malanbarra people. One of his most gracious acts was a cross cultural event of making the Ngajonji shield for Emma Johnson and Jessie Calico.

Due to his enormous educational, scientific and community contributions the Wet Tropics Management Authority gave him an honoured Cassowary Award in 2001. Some of the legacy of George's knowledge and skills is in publications such as "Grammar of Yidiny", "Words of Our Country", "A Rainforest Pharmacopoeia", and his beloved book "The Mullunburra, People of the Mulgrave River".

Last year George led an excursion for Society for Growing Australian Plants into his Malanbarra country As soon as we entered, George immediately became animated and many years younger in age. It was a wonderful experience to be with him and his joy will always be treasured.

At the funeral, some flowers and foliage of plants that George knew and used in his Malanbarra country were placed on the coffin and buried with George. They were Jagal (Brown Silky Oak, *Darlingia darlingiana*), Jungkurra (Black Bean, *Castanospermum australe*), Jadaga (Medicine Orchid, *Cymbidium madidum*), Giwan (Flame Tree, *Brachychiton acerifolius*), Garugar (Umbrella Tree, *Schefflera actinophylla*), Windin (Creek Bottle Brush, *Callistemon viminalis*), Nambar (Cadagi Tree, *Corymbia torrelliana*), Wunu (Hope's Cycad, *Lepidozamia hopei*), Badil (Queensland Cycad, *Cycas media*).

In addition, were added leaves of Gunagarray, (Slippery Blue Fig, *Ficus albipila*), the tree from which George made his traditional shields and leaves of Blush Alder (*Sloanea australis*). Nganggabana was born under a Blush Alder, 80 years ago and as the leaves of this tree were present on his arrival into the world, it was filling they were present on his departure.

### Why do TREAT Committee Meetings take so long?

Isn't TREAT an amazing organisation. We have a great community and great team work. Everyone working together to achieve the best results for all our various projects. Each year the committee manages substantial amounts of money for the running of these projects. TREAT alone, as a well established group, with an impressive membership and reputation, needs careful management. Projects need co-ordinating, decisions on spending need to be made and our marvellous works need to be promoted. This all takes time and effort. This year, we have 12 hard working volunteer committee members, and once a month on a Monday evening we get together for a lengthy meeting and oil the machine.

Here's what we do -

- Apply for grants and funds
- Manage the TREAT general funds (10,000's of dollars each year)
- Manage the grant funds responsibly (\$98,000+ in 10 accounts last year)
- Deal with TREAT general business and correspondences
- A 500 strong membership has to be organised and kept track of
- Promote and publicise what we do
- Newsletter production and distribution 4 times a year
- T-shirts and Videos are bought and sold
- Posters and the mobile display is organised
- Pamphlets and other leaflets produced and distributed
- Press Releases are written and given to the media
- Workshops and field days have to be organised, promoted and catered
- Our website is kept up to date
- Projects have to be managed, promoted and reported on
- Relationships with the rural sector, business, schools and general community are built
- Members attend workshops and conferences
- The Annual General Meeting and Christmas party needs organising promoting and catering
- And this year our new Visitor's Centre needs to be created and promoted.

This is your TREAT committee:

- President - Barbara Lanskey
- Vice-President - Joan Wright
- General Secretary - Doug Burchill
- Grants Administrator - Noel Grundton
- Treasurer - Col Walsh
- Membership Secretary - Barb Walsh
- Minutes and Media - Fiona Landers
- Retiring Secretary - John Hall
- Project and Website - Simon Burchill
- Revered Expert - Tony Irvine
- New Member - Rosemarie Pilmer
- Newsletter Editor - Bronwyn Robertson

Our four main projects this year as well as our TREAT on TAP program which will be co-ordinated by Marie Morgan, are Peterson Creek (yr 6), North Johnstone River (yr 2), Upper Barron (yr 2) and a new project on Cherry Creek. If you have any queries, concerns or ideas, you can approach any of the committee members who can raise issues at the monthly meetings on your behalf.

### Nursery News

The last three months are the time of year of consolidating our efforts in the field and in the nursery. Field staff have spent many hours of hard yakka bringing our site maintenance up to date. The fine cool weather and growing weather enables weeds to be kept in check and puts us in a good position for the upcoming planting season. Nursery stock for the 2003 season is progressively being potted up and sown well in the nursery. It is critical that we have well advanced stock (300mm high) for the majority of rain forest species to ensure good site establishment.

All sites for the 2003 planting season have been finalised and site preparation is now underway. Until we receive rain, little planting will occur unless those areas can be irrigated. We have a full schedule of Friday morning plantings organised and the usual array of larger community planting days scheduled for several Saturday mornings during the wet season (January through March).

The upcoming workshops on Mabi Forest and Plant Propagation and Identification will undoubtedly be well attended and it's a great opportunity for TREAT members to take advantage of the available expertise and expand their understanding of the fascinating forests around us.

The recent listing of Mabi forest as 'critically endangered' under the Federal Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act is a great achievement for TREAT affording further protection and recognition of this very special ecosystem which has increasingly been the focus of much of our conservation and revegetation efforts.

CTR has enjoyed the company of some very special students and volunteers in recent months including Yoshiko from Japan, Friderike from Germany and Anne and Adeline from Nurltingen University also in Germany. Mike Bowie arrived mid-October from Lincoln University, Canterbury, New Zealand undertaking studies on insect and reptile colonisation in replanted areas.

Peter Dellow has developed a great program with Rangers Tamara Vallance and Alf Woodley (Lake Eacham) and the students of Trinity Anglican School to replant road verges in the Lake Eacham Section of Crater Lakes National Park and will also be establishing a rare and threatened plant arboretum. The arboretum will be established adjacent to the Laurel Arboretum opposite the nursery complex and will have the added benefit of reducing lawn mowing maintenance for Parks staff.

Regular visitors to the CTR will have seen the progress on the new building with completion scheduled for the end of November. The building will house the new WTMA funded TREAT visitor centre and additional office space. We congratulate Angelo Salerno for his excellent efforts around the nursery grounds really lifting the appearance and atmosphere of the immediate nursery environment.

There has been a range of new equipment purchased including a trailer set up for herbicide spraying, a new trailer for transporting trees and a dangerous goods store for correct storage of chemicals. Finally, the steam cleaner has been ordered for sterilising used pots and trays. This is a significant investment for the nursery and will make pot washing by hand obsolete - hooray!!

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### An insignificant Fruit of the Month

A small, dull, green, semi-fleshy, globose capsule, 5-7mm long x 5-7mm diameter which splits in half to reveal a glossy shiny black seed is our fruit of the month. This fruit belongs to *Geijera salicifolia* var. *salicifolia* (Green Satinheart, (Rutaceae Family)). The fruits develop from small whitish flowers with 5-6 petals which occur on the twigs beyond the leaves. The seed is presented as a shiny black eye (the blackness being actually a very thin sarcotesta covering the seed). This eye attracts birds such as Lewin's Honeyeater, King Parrots, Brown Cuckoo Dove and Brush Turkey which disperse the seed. "Geijera" is named after a botanist, J. D. Geijer and "salicifolia" refers to leaves resembling that of the Willow Tree which belongs to the genus *Salix*. This latter name is a little odd as our northern specimens have leaves that are much broader than classic willow leaves. Leaves are dark-green, elliptical in shape with an acute to slightly obtuse tip and a cuneate to obtuse base. Edges of the leaves are entire and the blade and petiole lack hairs (i.e. glabrous). The midrib is distinctly raised above and 10-15 pairs of parallel veins forming angles greater than 60° with the midrib can be seen from above. These veins are difficult to see from below. Numerous oil dots are present and the leaf is quite aromatic when crushed. The petiole is distinctly grooved above and the most distinctive feature is the new leaves which are curled lengthwise and resemble a fig stipule before opening. The tree tends to prefer the drier rain forests and is an ideal Mabi forest species.

Its distribution ranges from central NSW through to New Guinea and New Caledonia predominantly in drier rain forest, monsoon forest, beach forest and to a much lesser extent in moister forests. Altitude in North Queensland is between sea level and 1000m.

The form of the tree tends initially to be roundish with the foliage extended to the ground. The wood is quite dense, weighing 995 kg/m<sup>3</sup>. Compare this to last fruit of the month, *Jitta (Halfordia scleroxyle)* which is close to the densest rain forest wood, weighing 1105kg/m<sup>3</sup> and that of Candlenut (*Aleurites rockinghamensis*) 465 kg/m<sup>3</sup>, the wood used in the show woodchop contests. This wood in Jimmy Denton's pile for the Candlenut logs, he still would have won the wood chopping contest and Jimmy's axe may have been lucky to survive as another common name for the tree is Axe-gapper. Unfortunately Danny Janggaburru and Betty Bunyji our two Yidinyji and Najorji friends, respectively, did not know a language name for this tree.

### Owl Survey

You will find attached to this edition of your TREAT News information and survey on owls on the Tableland. Some interesting information is included on owls and their impact on rats. The survey will be used to gather details on owl distribution - please contact the people listed on the survey for further information.

More information on this survey can be obtained from the Barron River Integrated Catchment Management Association (BRICMA)

[Owl Survey Form](#)

BRICMA website [www.barronriver.com.au](#)

### Weedbuster Week

A successful weed-busting day was held with over thirty volunteers at Tolga Scrub on Saturday 19th October as part of the Weed buster Week activities.

*Solanum seaforthianum*, or Brazilian nightshade, was targeted by the volunteers, with most of the disturbed track area treated within a couple of hours.

Jenny Maclean gave an interesting talk on the importance of the Scrub as a maternity site for Little Red and Spectacled Flying Foxes, which have now been listed as vulnerable to extinction. Tony Irvine was also on hand to describe the range of weeds and other potentially dangerous species within the Scrub, including stinging trees, lawyer vines and arenic bush.

Tolga Scrub is one of the few remaining public owned remnants of Mabi, or Type 5b, rainforest. It occurs on the northern, drier edge of the range of this forest type and is exposed to a range of threatening processes. The efforts of all the volunteers at TREAT's Weedbuster Day has helped to control one of these threats, although ongoing weed management will be a high priority. Thanks to everyone for their help!

### Field Day at Barry and Jan Thurlings

Over 30 people attended this day and were lucky enough to see the amazing results of almost twenty years hard work. Barry and Jan started tree planting to improve the quality of their creek water back in 1986, in the process transforming stagnant, para grass infested silt into a fast flowing rain forest stream complete with platypus and yabbies.

Visitors were impressed by the scale of the work, (it covers over 5ha), the size of the trees (many have buttress roots), and the commitment of the landholders (for whom tree planting became a consuming passion!). There are now over 100 species of birds on the property, and many native mammals including possums and tree kangaroos.

A feature for many members was the results of Barry's direct seeding work. Because there are no large forest patches close by, the planting was not being visited by seed dispersers that are more common in mature forest, such as birds like cassowaries and wompoo pigeons, and mammals such as musky rat kangaroo and specialised flying foxes. This resulted in a lack of natural regeneration of rain forest species under the new canopy. Barry decided to try collecting forest seeds from around Malanda and then scattering them throughout his planting. This has worked admirably - many species that prefer shaded conditions i.e. Tarzali Silkwood (*Cryptocarya oblata*), or those that germinate erratically i.e. Black Pine (*Prumnopitys amara*) have germinated and grown well, and are now coming up throughout the planted areas. Many members have planted areas that can be treated in the same way. If you have access to a patch of forest and the landholder's consent, or a friend with a patch of remnant vegetation think about hand seeding as an economical and easy way to increase the diversity of species in your patch.

This is yet another of the many benefits that have come from Barry and Jan's efforts. Long term efforts such as these teach us a lot about restoring degraded lands, and many of our most valuable lessons have come from observing changes on the Thurling's property. Many thanks Barry and Jan for all your preparation for the day and a special thank-you for the inspirational work.

### On Caring for Country - Helping to Heal Country Program - Part II

For any program to become strong it cannot do the journey itself, it needs a lot of very special ingredients mixed together to make it work. The nursery is a unique place that allows this mixing to happen.

The staff and the TREAT volunteers at the nursery are very special people. We have been able to foster and develop a sharing experience to healing country/ ecological restoration. This has built bridges across cultural boundaries, allowing respect for each other to have their cultural differences. This has become a learning adventure for us all.

As indigenous trainees, trainers, and traditional owners ourselves, we are aware of Customary law/lore, Cultural protocols and sensitivity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) issues relating to healing country. Ecological restoration.

Any training that has a western scientific component to it, can become a barrier for indigenous peoples, so it is important for the indigenous and non-indigenous trainers to be aware of this from the beginning.

With this in mind, we delivered training to the Cultural and Natural Resource Management students from the Caring for Country unit, Cairns TAFE.

Units such as;

- Collecting seeds from Native Plants. Warren has put together a "Collecting Native Seeds" workbook for this workshop. Students learn about how seeds are dispersed, different types of seeds, the collecting of native seeds, phonology recording and cleaning of seeds.
- Manage Weed, Pest and Disease in which we deliver the weed component. The students were taught to notice what a weed is, recognise an environmental weed, how seeds are dispersed, understanding the difference between a perennial, bi-annual and annual weeds and the control of weeds. Warren is now in the process of putting a weed workbook together.
- Monitoring Biological Species/Watching Country: -for the practical side of this workshop, we use the area at the side of the nursery that has been set up for training purposes. Students carry out small mammal trapping, bird counts and vegetation measurements.

These workshops have been on going.

Starting with the traditional and custodian relationship to land, these residents are held on their traditional country. It is very important that the students are welcomed on country first by the traditional owners before the training starts. This allows for the students to feel comfortable being on another tribal groups country/ traditional home. This is our way (indigenous way) for starting any business.

I will continue in the next newsletter.

### Work Shops on Identification and Propagation of Native Plants

TREAT and the Centre for Tropical Restoration will be holding their popular annual workshops on Identification and propagation of native plants on two Saturday afternoons in November (9<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> November). Beginning at 1pm and aiming to finish at 4pm. All TREAT members and prospective TREAT members are invited to come along to this free educational afternoon on the finer details of tree planting and native forest restoration.

The venue is The Centre for Tropical Restoration at McLeish Rd, Lake Eacham.

The session on plant identification is extremely informative and lively and will again this year be presented by our noted rainforest ecologist, Tony Irvine. The session on seed and plant propagation will be held by a member of the Centre for Tropical Restoration's experienced Rain Forest Ecologists. This is a practical and interesting session detailing the different categories of seeds and how to handle them for successful propagation.

Each workshop is in two sessions. The participants form two groups so that the sessions can be run side by side with a swap over after the afternoon tea at about 2.30 pm, which is provided free.

The workshop will be of particular interest to the new Tablelander landholders with a view to planting native trees on their property and also to members interested in creating habitat for native birds and other wildlife. But of course, all interested members are welcome. It is also a good networking opportunity for such people.

For more information about the workshops and bookings or tree planting projects, please contact The Centre for Tropical Restoration on 4095 3406.

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