



QGN News #8

June 2009

Welcome to Queensland Glider Network News

This issue of Network News brings you a variety of short updates which we hope you will find interesting. We highlight again the crucial work being carried out to help protect the mahogany glider and its habitat. Following the devastating fires in Victoria, we received many enquiries about the impact on wildlife and, in particular, concern over the plight of Leadbeater's possum. We welcome Rachael Attard, Wildlife Queensland's multi-talented new volunteer, who has compiled this newsletter and has also carefully researched the article you will find on page 3. We also update you on the progress of our Scouting for Gliders project.

We appreciate all feedback from QGN members — please let us know what you'd like to read about in QGN News.

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PS Don't forget to check out our portal at my.wildlife.org.au
Post us a question ... or an answer ... or create your own blog!



Signs of life—good news for local wildlife Mahogany Glider country—far north Queensland

Since 2007, environmental works have been taking place as an integral part of a major highway upgrade south of Tully in far north Queensland. In May 2007, as part of the 'Gliders in the Spotlight' program, Wildlife Qld's project officer Ben Holmes, joined the Tully branch to help raise awareness of the needs of the endangered mahogany glider. Part of this program included a joint project with the Environmental Protection Agency, Tully Alliance, the company coordinating the highway upgrade and local WPSQ members to install 12 glider den boxes at Corduroy Creek.

Since this initial den box work was undertaken in 2007, Karsten Stevenson, Group Environmental Advisor at BDM Constructions and Ben Sallaras of Tully Alliance and their teams have continued to work to assist wildlife in their project area and beyond. At the close of 2008

they had installed 52 den boxes and the project had completed the major installation of mahogany glider poles and rope bridges across the Bruce Highway. It is hoped that this will assist possums and gliders in the area to safely cross this major highway. The highway crossing is monitored by IP cameras and highway signage has been installed. Yet another organisation willing to assist is ITC. ITC is developing a plantation on the properties adjacent to the



highway crossing and has replaced all top strand barbed wire from all fencing adjacent to the highway crossing. The forestry project manager has indicated that consideration will be given to the possibility of alternatives to barbed wire as their project develops. In addition, Cassowary Coast Regional Council's Cardwell revegetation unit have supplied native plants to ensure that the plantings are suitable for local wildlife.

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Photo: Daryl Dickson

Signs of life—good news for local wildlife

In January this year, Ben Sallaras and his team went out to check the 52 den boxes and came back with some very pleasing results. Checking of den boxes is not the easiest task at the best of times; add to that all the challenges of the wet season in our lowland coastal swampy woodland and you really have to be keen to complete such a task. Keen they were! It was wonderful to share the excitement of finding the first signs of occupation. After such a short period of time and with all the road works in the area, I had been doubtful that boxes would show signs of use but that was certainly not the case. Two den boxes had small groups of sugar gliders and six other boxes showed very recent signs of use with fresh nesting material present in the boxes. We are still waiting to find our first den of mahogany gliders but signs are promising for the future.

In addition to these, the Tully Alliance has planted over 42,000 native tree species throughout the project area. These plantings are in and around Corduroy Creek, Murray River to Lagoon Creek and Lagoon Creek overflow the Tully River specifically to provide connectivity between waterway areas. There is evidence of birdlife and other wildlife already residing and feeding in these planting areas. In addition, underpasses through some culverts for cassowaries and fish passages in numerous culverts along the Murray Flats section of the new highway have been put in place. The fish passage devices partly baffle water



flow through the culverts, allowing migrating fish such as barramundi to move upstream and colonise creeks and lagoons. We look forward to the next den box audit and the first images of wildlife safely using the highway crossing.

The large highway signs declare 'building safer roads for all Australians.' It has been very rewarding to see so many organisations working towards better outcomes for our wildlife.

Written by Daryl Dickson.

Photos: Ben Sallaras, Tully Alliance.

The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland Tully & District Branch

The connection of wildlife habitat and corridors

On Saturday June 13th 2009, the Tully & District Branch held a picnic afternoon tea at Corduroy Creek as 'a celebration of connection'

To celebrate the installation of a major wildlife crossing – glider poles, rope bridges, den boxes, revegetation and high signage.



Impact of Victorian Bushfires on the Leadbeater's Possum

The Leadbeater's possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*) is Victoria's faunal emblem and only endemic mammal. The possum is restricted to mountain ash forests of Victoria's Central Highlands which consist primarily of eucalyptus trees such as Mountain Ash, Alpine Ash and Shining Gum. Before the fires, there were three known possum populations located at Lake Mountain, central highlands around Marysville and Toolangi, and Yellingbo. Two of the three locations (Lake Mountain and Marysville/Toolangi) were badly burnt in January's Victorian bushfire disaster and current estimates predict 50-60% of the Leadbeater's home range has been destroyed.

At Lake Mountain prior to the bushfires, 30 nestboxes had been installed to provide shelter and breeding sites for the possum. It was known that over 100 Leadbeater's possums were utilising these nestboxes. After the bushfires only 2 of the 30 nestboxes remained, with only 6 possums surviving the fire. No more have been found since.



Photo: Dan Harley

Fire can have adverse effects on the possum directly, as well as indirectly, through destruction of habitat and food resources. Intense fire can devastate ancient trees that possess hollows required by the Leadbeater's possum for shelter and breeding. They require hollows for survival, and spend 75% of their time in the nest. A major concern is that only very old trees develop hollows and it takes more than 150 years for suitable hollows to develop. As a result, the Leadbeater's possum's habitat will take hundreds of years to recover. They also require dense wattle understorey to provide protection and plant exudates such as sap that they feed on. A dense understorey also provides suitable habitat for insects, which make up part of their diet.

The Leadbeater's Possum is currently listed as endangered by IUCN, however of all the species affected by the Victorian bushfires the possum remains the most critically vulnerable. Total population abundance before the fires was estimated to be less than 3000 individuals. Today it is believed that the population stands at fewer than 1000 individuals, however absolute numbers are unknown. Researchers have no doubt that the possum has been severely impacted by the bushfires.

It is feared that the possum is on the verge of extinction and a vital recovery program has been set up to assist the recovery of this highly threatened species. New plastic nestboxes have been reinstalled with food



Photo: Steve Smith (Department of Sustainability and Environment)

supplements such as creamed honey. Feed stations with fly pupae, mealworms and fruit have been used to help prevent starvation. Infra-red cameras have been set up to monitor the presence and abundance of Leadbeater's possums, and observe whether they are using the feed stations. There are no captive breeding programs underway, so the recovery of this animal relies on the success of the field recovery program. It is predicted that numbers may only begin to recover within the next 10 to 15 years.

Written by Rachael Attard.

Further Reading:

The Wilderness Society (2009). *Preliminary report: impact of 2009 Victorian bushfires on nature and wildlife*. The Wilderness Society Victoria Inc, Victoria.

Nicki Munro (2009). Friends of Leadbeater's Possum Inc. The Australian National University: College of Medicine, Biology and the Environment. Conservation and Landscape Ecology. <http://fennerschool-research.anu.edu.au/cle/vchstudy/friendsoflbp.php>. Last updated February 2009.



Photo: Dan Harley

Did you know...

Leadbeater's possum is closely related to the sugar glider (*Petaurus breviceps*). Main difference is that it does not have a gliding membrane. It also has a club-shaped tail which fluffs out near the end.

To read more about 'Snow Possums: Project ALPS' by Dan Harley, see the Winter 2007 issue of Wildlife Australia Magazine.

Scouting for gliders

Wildlife Queensland has been scouting for gliders across the suburbs and into the scout dens and guide huts of south-east Queensland. This new and innovative project encourages young people associated with scouts and guides through participation in a range of workshops, spotlighting events, visual and interactive presentations, and monitoring of newly-installed nestboxes.

Presentations include a lively introduction to the six gliders of Queensland, including sound effects. Scouts and guides contribute to discussions about special features of the gliders and their needs for survival. Groups participate in a spotlighting event in their local area accompanied by experienced wildlife professionals and spotlighters.

The chance to learn new skills in glider ecology and identify glider food trees is a fun challenge that involves new and interesting activities. Many are excited to learn they can now pick the difference between wattle trees and gum trees purely by scent. The opportunity to learn how to distinguish the different bark types or gum nuts found on the ground is a valuable addition to their scouting or guiding skills.



All scouts and guides receive a free glider pack containing a glider wall chart, *Wildlife Australia* magazine, guide to spotlighting arboreal mammals, recording sheet and set of four glider posters developed especially by the Queensland Glider Network. Here are some activities the scouts undertook recently.



Salisbury Scouts

The Salisbury Scouts were given an informative and fun visual presentation on the Gliders of Queensland. Guest presenter and leading glider researcher Teresa Eyre brought along the sounds of the forest with calls by the sugar glider, squirrel glider, yellow-bellied glider and powerful owl.

The group began their first spotlight session with a guided walk around surrounding area and were rewarded with a tawny frogmouth, kookaburra, and two brush-tailed possums. The scouts then participated in a fun session identifying features of glider food trees.

Gap Guides

The Gap Guides discussed Australian gliders with a visual presentation by Christine Pfitzner. The special features of the gliders became the hot topic as the guides matched the glider names with their description.

The guides then learnt the differences between wattles and gums and how valuable they both are to the gliders for survival. The guides completed their first step in identifying glider food trees with close examination of the different leaves, bark and capsules.

The Gap Guides went spotlighting at Bellbird Grove, Brisbane Forest Park. Under the guidance of Christine Pfitzner, Damian White and Narelle Power, the guides investigated different habitat types hoping to spot a glider.

While no gliders were spotted on the night, the groups were rewarded with nocturnal residents including brushtail possums, flying foxes, microchiropteran bats, and hares.

The guides were also lucky enough to spot golden orb spiders, yabbies and stoney creek frog tadpoles. In all, 23 species were recorded.



Narangba Scouts

The Narangba Scouts had an introduction to the Gliders of Queensland. By the end of the session, the scouts were able to identify the gliders by their physical characteristics and habitat requirements.

The group went spotlighting in nearby Sheepstation Creek Conservation Park at Morayfield. No gliders were spotted on the night, but some saw the small microchiropteran bats.



The scouts braved the impending storms to attend a visit by Wildlife Queensland. The 11 scouts successfully identified the leaves, bark and capsules of a range of glider food trees.

The Narangba Scout hut is located in glider habitat where key food trees *Melaleuca quinquenervia* are found.

Written by Chris Pfitzner.



**Protecting wildlife
Influencing choices
Engaging communities**

Share your knowledge and create your own blog!

Have you visited the QGN interactive forum? Go to my.wildlife.org.au and talk to us, share information about gliders, show us your photos and meet other QGN members.

The Queensland Glider Network is a program run by The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (*Wildlife Queensland* or WPSQ).

We are a community environmental organisation with a diverse membership drawn together by a common interest in wildlife. *Wildlife Queensland* started in 1962 and since then has been working to protect Australia's precious and vanishing natural environment.

If you would like to join WPSQ, subscribe to *Wildlife Australia* Magazine or are interested in volunteering, please contact us:

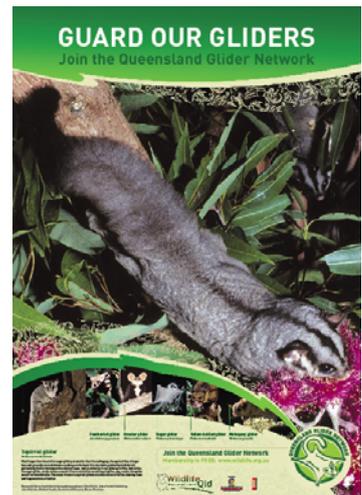
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Whether you are a conservationist, researcher, carer, or simply interested in gliders, you will find QGN has something to offer you, and in turn, you may have information to share with all of us. We hope that you find this newsletter of interest and that the QGN will provide a valuable meeting place and resource centre for all people with an interest in gliders, their habitat and the issues facing their conservation. Email us your glider news to glider@wildlife.org.au



To join QGN (it's free) - download the membership form from <http://www.wildlife.org.au/qgnsurvey.pdf>



New squirrel glider poster \$5 each + \$5 p&p

You've seen our sugar, greater and mahogany glider posters, we now have a squirrel glider.

About our contributors

Many thanks to the following QGN members who contributed to this newsletter:

Daryl Dickson, Cardwell.



Daryl is an active member of Wildlife Queensland Tully Branch and an ardent campaigner, particularly for mahogany glider habitat.

The first captive-bred mahogany glider to be returned to the wild was released on Daryl's property.

Rachael Attard, Brisbane.



Rachael studied ecology and zoology at the University of Queensland, where she is now a post-graduate student.

Her research focuses on koalas and the impact that tooth wear has on their energy consumption.

Rachael is now a key member of the Wildlife Queensland volunteer team, assisting with projects, including this newsletter!

Chris Pfitzner, Ipswich.



Chris is a science education specialist and conducts workshops for our Gliders in the Spotlight program. She also recently developed our new quoll education kit.

Chris has been with Wildlife Queensland for 3 years and is also our Mangrove Watch coordinator. We're still discovering Chris's many hidden talents - so she doesn't get lost!

Teresa Eyre, Brisbane.



Teresa is a research field ecologist with DERM. Teresa studied the fauna of

managed forest ecosystems of NSW and QLD, helping develop logging standards to protect hollow dependent wildlife such as gliders.

Teresa is currently researching biodiversity values in the Mulga and Brigalow bioregions, where the appearance of the occasional sugar or squirrel glider keeps her happy.