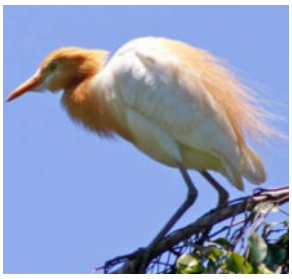
Upper Dawson Branch WPSQ November Newsletter
Compiled by Ann Hobson



Under an overcast Sunday morning sky, there were twenty cattle egrets in orange breeding plumage lined up on the bank of the irrigation dam just east of the Dawson River bridge near Theodore without a cow in sight. A wedgetail eagle was hunched most top-heavily on a fence post just south of the bridge looking disconsolately down into the roadside grass. Perhaps the humidity made flying more of an effort than usual, as the egrets were still there three hours later. *Photo Cattle Egret. Allan Briggs, 'Birds of the Dawson'*

Later, it began to drizzle, and then patchy rain overnight gave a 20mm back-up to the 33mm a fortnight before. In the month noted for its cruel heatwaves, the reprieve of overcast and rainy days is most welcome, especially where wildfires have been raging, it and should boost the tinge of green to be seen among the brown grass and on bare paddocks along the Highway. Sympathy to those who have missed these very patchy falls, and hope that the predicted El Nino won't be too severe.

The rain has also boosted the 'Willows Cactus', *Cereus uruguayanus*, which is rapidly being spread in our scrubs and along fence lines by crows who eat the tasty seed-peppered fruit and plant it in their droppings wherever they perch. As cactoblastis don't touch it, it's set to be a serious scourge, requiring constant vigilance. It's easy to dig out while small, then dried out before disposal. Councils will treat it and other feral plants on roadsides if they are reported, which is easy to do using the **'Snap, Send, Solve' App** by taking a photo to send with a word or two about the sighting. Potholes, broken signs, damaged facilities, and other pests can also be reported this way. The photo location is used to send the message to the Shire in which the photo was taken. For faster action from Council, **install it today**. Our input is welcomed.

We were delighted to enjoy the company of DES scientists Maria and Cath from Brisbane and guests from the Taroom district at the Wetlands Presentation following our AGM 28 October. With fires raging on the major routes from Brisbane, presenters sought advice, stayed overnight at Eidsvold, and arrived in time to share their extensive knowledge of Queensland's wetlands with a keenly engaged audience. On return to Eidsvold, they were officially advised to 'prepare to leave' from the motel, so chose to leave anyway for an undisturbed night at Munduberra, though Eidsvold locals *unofficially* advised that the fire was most unlikely to cross the Burnett River to reach the motel. It's to be hoped that the recent rain and some new growth will dampen the intensity of any future outbreaks this year.

Thanks to Viola for this report of the presentation. *Pictures are from the handouts for the event.*

Great Barrier Reef (GBR) Wetland Condition Monitoring Program

On 28 October 2023 the *Great Barrier Reef (GBR) Wetland Condition Monitoring Program* was the topic for a public meeting of the Upper Dawson Branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland at Taroom. Guest presenter was Maria Vandergragt, Principal Environmental Scientist, Wetland Condition Science, Science Division, Queensland Department of Environment and Science (DES), supported by team member, freshwater ecologist and statistician, Catherine Leigh.
The Program, for which data gathering commenced in 2016, is tracking the progress of the *Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan (Reef 2050 Plan)*

objective: improved wetland condition. Maria noted that freshwater wetlands are vital to people and the environment and are critical for maintaining biodiversity, buffering extreme weather events, reducing the impacts of floods, retaining water in the landscape, and connecting freshwater and marine ecosystems.

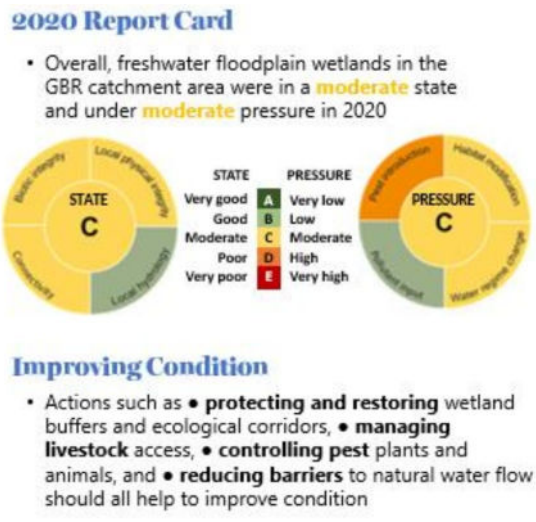
Attendees shared their observations of local ephemeral wetlands, new (mini) boggomoss springs and springs in water courses, as well as substantial springs lost through changed land use practices.

The speakers shared the findings of a sediment core taken from Lake Murphy Conservation Park which encapsulated approximately 1000 years' history. Approximately 1100-1500 before the current era (CE), climate variability increased and generally drier (savannah) vegetation and shallower water bodies prevailed. Between approximately 1600-1800 CE the Little Ice Age brought generally wetter conditions and growth of schlerophyll woodland and forest, and deeper waters. Then from 1800-2019 conditions became drier again and an increase in sedimentation associated with European settlement was evident. The findings from the core sample spoke to the ability of wetland buffers to help limit sedimentation.

The GBR catchment is vast (423,000km^2) and contains more than 14,000 natural freshwater wetlands. As clearly not all wetlands can be surveyed and monitored, the speakers outlined the method for selection and monitoring of a representative random sample of approximately 240 wetlands, spanning each of the six regional catchments, from Cape York to the Burnett-Mary. The random selection ensures that the wetlands are spread across the landscape in a variety of land uses including urban, mining, horticulture and agriculture.

The monitoring program helps identify if current land management practices are supporting or improving wetlands. The program can also help guide targeted allocation of future resources. A typical survey takes about half a day and may be conducted annually or every four years, with landholder participation entirely voluntary. The monitoring team is interested in the plant species and their ecosystems, soil disturbance, feral pests, weeds and features that influence the water cycle, as well as the connection between the wetland and surrounding landscape and the condition of the area around the wetland. Water quality data is not collected.

Individual wetland data are combined to estimate overall representative scores for the GBR Report Cards. The 2022 report is likely to be released in 2024 following completion of data analysis.
For Further information:
Wetland Spotter is a mobile application that allows the user to submit photographs and other information on wetlands across Queensland to the Queensland Herbarium for identification and mapping.
Fitzroy Basin reports -
https://riverhealth.org.au/factsheets-reports/
https://www.reefplan.qld.gov.au/tracking-progress/reef-report-card/2016 *Thanks Viola*



Late news:- Council has engaged Helen Schwencke to advise on butterfly attractive native plantings during December, and some of us hope to catch up with her to look for plants in local scrubs that may provide seed for such plants.

Our Branch offers its best wishes for the holiday season and your enjoyment of the natural wonders of our land.