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BULLET

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WISDOM OF THE ELDERS

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WISDOM OF THE ELDERS MEETS TECHNO!



CENTURIES OF EXPERIENCE IN WATER MANAGEMENT SIT AROUND THE TABLE, PASTORALISTS RANGING FROM A TEENAGER TO GREY HEADED PASTORAL ELDERS. AND THESE MEN AND WOMEN ARE TALKING ... BEST METHODS OF PUMPING AND RETICULATING WATER, MAKING DAMS, SOLAR SYSTEMS REPLACING WIND SYSTEMS, PLASTIC TANKS REPLACING TURKEY NESTS AS WATER STORAGES, LIMITING EVAPORATION.

Around the table the landholders speak freely, a huge amount of hard-won knowledge fills the conference room in the DPI building on the outskirts of Longreach. And this is only the beginning. The day is part of the introduction of the Water-Smart Pastoral Production Project. This project will identify, trial and research the latest technologies in water

use. Under the quiet facilitation of Craig James from the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre based in Alice Springs, pastoralists describe their experiences – good and bad – with new technologies such as solar powered pumping of water, monitoring of waters with telemetry, and evaporation reduction. The project is a collaboration between DCQ, the

Centralian Land Management Association of Alice Springs, Desert Knowledge CRC (project manager), and the South Australian Arid Lands Integrated Natural Resource Management Group. The information day's purpose was to find out what areas of water use pastoralists were interested in. What areas? All it seems.

So while Craig James' black marker pen filled whiteboard after whiteboard, the men and women talked of dam building and maintenance, exclusion fences, solar pumps replacing windmills ("we cut the towers up for angle iron and dig a hole with the bulldozer and bury the things."), engine driven pumps, the location of watering points ... and on the day went. If the Desert Knowledge people were looking for passionate participation, they got it.

The Project

The Project organisers are establishing demonstration properties across the region covered by the project – Western Queensland, northern South Australia and the southern part of the Northern Territory. The new technologies will be set up on these properties and researchers will monitor their efficiencies over time. As the systems begin working, these demonstrator properties will be opened for field days to share the knowledge with the grazing industry at large.

Sustainability is the essence of productivity and DCQ is collaborating on the Water Smart project with the South Australian Arid Lands NRM Board (SAAL), the Centralian Land Management Association (CLMA) in the Northern Territory and the Alice Springs based Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre.

The 3 year Water Smart Project is aimed at ensuring the viability, sustainability and productivity of arid and semi-arid pastoral lands. Water is paramount for an economically sustainable pastoral enterprise and its smart use will not only contribute to the eco-

conomic sustainability, it will benefit inland Australia's environment for future generations.

The project combines the best grazing management with the best technologies in stock water storage and delivery on pastoral properties to help improve: stock management control, total grazing pressure and pastoral country condition. The project will bring together those with expertise in supplying water on pastoral properties including landholders, suppliers, researchers and industries. The aim of the project is to share information and develop new, innovative stock water management options for landholders.

\$200,000 a year just running waters

Remote monitoring attracted interest at the information day, particularly from land managers from larger properties with water runs of more than 800 km that have to be run twice a week. One grazier said, "We spend in the vicinity of \$200,000 a year just running waters. Being able to reduce this to one run a week could save us up to \$100,000 a year." Remote monitoring by telemetry is a quickly moving science. One system described on the day used UHF frequencies and repeaters to deliver data to the homestead on water depth in tanks and troughs, and whether the solar pump is running. These systems have the ability to start or stop a diesel powered pump, even send images of the water infrastructure and livestock drinking.

The Longreach meeting made the decision to form a Water-Smart regional steering committee to develop the process and criteria needed for the calling for applicant properties to take part in the trial and how the trial will be implemented. Equipment manufacturers will be approached to offer partnership in the trials. Longreach-based water-Smart Project Officer Cameron O'Neil says he was heartened by the response on the day and says this is one project we will all be hearing more of – "Watch this space!"

Contact DCQ for more details.

WEED CONTROL WITH ATTITUDE

THE CROSS-CATCHMENTS WEEDS AND FERAL ANIMALS INITIATIVE FOCUSES ON THE PROTECTION AND REGENERATION OF BIODIVERSITY AND PRODUCTION WITHIN THE DCQ REGION. IT ADDRESSES THE IMPACTS OF WEEDS AND FERAL ANIMALS WITH DIRECT ON-GROUND WORK IN AFFECTED AREAS, AND IMPROVING THE LANDHOLDER'S ABILITY TO CARRY OUT EFFECTIVE PEST CONTROL. THE FUNDING FOCUSES ON THE REPAIR AND PROTECTION OF BIODIVERSITY IN CRITICAL REGIONAL AREAS SUCH AS LISTED WETLANDS AND SPRINGS. DCQ'S PROJECT OFFICER BRETT CARLSSON REPORTS ...

During a recent field day I attended in the Winton Shire, one of the landholders was recalling how he and his sister were paid pocket money to walk the property and collect "jelly beans" (i.e. Prickly acacia seeds) so their father could cast them out of the Toyota as he drove the waters— "if only we knew better, now look how much it is costing me to get rid of it!"

It is pleasing for me to see the change in landholders' attitudes to land protection even though we have all learnt the hard way. Yes, we have a long way to go, but in general I think landholders are now becoming more active and aware of the control of weeds not only on their place but in their catchments. Having spent a lot of time as a young bloke in western Queensland, and now having the opportunity to work in a natural resource management role, I have noticed the change in attitudes across the board.

A lot of credit must be given to the landholders who have been actively controlling their weeds for a long time. These landholders have outlaid the money and are now reaping the benefits of improved pasture growth and even higher property prices. If we can communicate weed control

to the landholder as an economic benefit, as well as a legal obligation, I think we can expect to see more and more landholders being proactive in weed control.

Overall I think, in the west, we are moving forward as a result of the motivation and work of landholders, Shire Rural Lands Officers, Local and State Government Agencies and Regional NRM bodies. With continued community consultation, information sharing and general support, land protection will continue to grow in importance to the wider community, and the environment will benefit the most of all.

As a final thought, sometimes we can look at land protection as too hard and too big of a problem, for us to have an impact on, but when you can look back at an area and see the improvements gained from some good hard on-ground work, it makes it all worthwhile. Let's keep on chippin' away at it!

Write a piece for the Basin Bullet - a short story? a poem? What's making you angry this week? Share your thoughts and creativity - contact the editor Bruce Honeywill at bhoneywill@bigpond.com

CONTROL OF FERAL PIGS IS ONE OF THE MANY CHALLENGES OF LAND MANAGEMENT. GETTING RID OF PIGS IS DIFFICULT BUT TODAY EVEN MORE ISSUES COME INTO PLAY. ON PROPERTIES STRIVING FOR BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICE, CONTROL TECHNIQUES HAVE TO MEET VARIOUS STANDARDS OF EFFICIENCY AND HUMANE KILLING. THE FEDERAL DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE HAS PRODUCED A CODE OF PRACTICE THAT ALLOWS BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICE TO BE ACHIEVED.

The negative elements of feral pigs are well known: digging up grasslands, preying on weak stock, competition with native species, and potentially, pigs are one of the most dangerous carriers of serious disease should outbreaks such as foot and mouth occur through Northern Australia.

Regional bodies such as DCQ are distributing funds for feral animal control, including feral pigs. But feral pigs remain amongst the hardest of the feral animals to control. A scheme proposed under the Lake Eyre Basin Coordinating Group some years ago promised eradication of pigs over a five year period. The humour of this proposal tickled the cynical outlook of anyone who had sighted a pig through the cross hairs of a high powered rifle. But control is possible. Pigs are a nomadic species, and if hit hard enough on one property, most will move away. All expert advice indicates a multiple approach is best – humane shooting, trapping and, if necessary, baiting.

But enter **Best Management Practice**. This concept is extending more and more beyond cattle-

THE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF GETTING RID OF PIGS



yard design, bruise reduction in transport and more humane husbandry procedures. With the rise of animal liberation and humane societies, landholders are being forced to introduce a more holistic Best Management Practice that includes all facets of land management. As a guideline, the Federal Department of Environment and Heritage has developed a Code of Practice for feral pig control. This code sets out a series of steps for implementation. First there needs to be strong community or political will for action. Efficient control is unlikely without strong community support. The people and the areas chalked out for control need to be identified. A strategy for the identified area should then be developed with reference to existing catchment or regional management plans and finally the most appropriate control measures for the region must be agreed.

Methods of Control

(1) **Exclusion fencing** – for Western Queensland the cost of pig-proof fencing is prohibitive except for high value areas such as irrigated crops, homesteads or small environmental sites of high conservation value.

(2) **Baiting with Sodium monofluoroacetate (1080)** – Relatively large amounts of 1080 are required for effective poisoning. Most effective to meet standards of Best Practice is ground baiting using baiting stations and pre-feeding. Aerial baiting is cost-effective but is more indiscriminate in target species.

(3) **Baiting with yellow phosphorous** poisons or Warfarin is not considered Best Practice and may attract criticism of the industry in the future. A wide spectrum of native target species killed by these baits is the biggest criticism.

(4) **Ground Shooting** is not considered an effective control measure on large properties. Humane

shooting can be seen however as a support to other methods.

(5) **Aerial Shooting** by professional shooters can be cost effective and efficient in situations of high pig numbers with high visibility. However, while per-pig cost may be low, it is a high capital investment to maintain.

(6) **Trapping** – an important method of control when carried out in a humane way (daily checks). Particularly important when carried out with other methods.



Developing a Sustainable Best Practice Feral Pig Management Plan

The DEH Code of Practice advises the following planning procedures:

- **Define the objectives – what the stakeholders want one year or five years down the track;**
- **Select the control options (above) most suited for the planned property or properties.**
- **Put an operations plan into place, who will**

carry out the work, when, where and how.
• Monitor the success of the program and how close the results come to the objectives.

Queensland Parks and Wildlife have, like all land managers, feral pig issues on national parks scattered through Western Queensland. District Manager at Longreach, Rob Murphy says the department has a feral pig control plan in place.

“We use a combined system of pig traps and bait stations using 1080,” he says.

“With the baiting stations, we pre-feed before laying the poison and use coloured grain and baits submerged in water to reduce by-kill of other species.”

Sixty pigs were taken on Idalia National Park in the past year. “And I guess that is representative of most of our Parks,” says Rob Murphy.

PREMANUFACTURED 1080 BAIT TRIAL

DCQ is currently discussing a field trial to look at the efficiency or otherwise of pre-manufactured 1080 baits. DCQ Project Officer Brett Carlsson says he is working with Animal Control Technologies and the new product “Pig-Out”. If the baits work it will reduce the work and occupational hazards of conventional 1080 baiting with fresh meat injected with the poison. He understands the meatmeal based baits take the form of large sausages. Pigs require a much larger dose of 1080 than dingoes. If the trial goes ahead it will involve baiting and monitoring with infrared cameras to ascertain what other animals show an interest in the pre-manufactured baits

A NEW VOICE

QUEENSLAND PARKS AND WILDLIFE HAS A NEW DISTRICT MANAGER IN WESTERN QUEENSLAND. ROB MURPHY TAKES OVER AT A TIME FOLLOWING AN EXPLOSIVE CONTROVERSY OVER THE REMOVAL OF RANGERS FROM NATIONAL PARKS. MURPHY SAYS HIS DEPARTMENT HAS FOUND A COMPROMISE TO SUIT BOTH SIDES OF THE DEBATE AND SAYS HE IS BRINGING IN A NEW PHASE OF DEPARTMENTAL OPENNESS TO THE COMMUNITY ...

Rob Murphy is the new face heading up Parks and Wildlife in the Longreach District. Rob comes to the West after five years in the wet green tropical rainforest national parks around Mackay, a change he sees as a challenge and an enriching life decision.

Arriving in Longreach six months ago, Rob Murphy was separated from his young family while getting his feet on the ground. His family, including three sons, has just joined him with the confirmation of his appointment as Parks and Wildlife's head honcho in the west.

The big challenge for Rob, he says, was to come to terms with the huge expanse over which the Western Division Parks are scattered. "Maintaining the safety of personnel from Birdsville through to Bladensburg National Park near Winton is a serious responsibility. The distance and climatic extremes make this a real challenge."

Rob says he spent the first six months getting staff levels up to adequate numbers and ensuring safety and logistic support throughout the region. Only now, he says, has he time to look forward and face what he sees as the three main immediate challenges of Parks and Wildlife in Outback Queensland.

"we need to present a positive approach to the



community ..."

"We have to ensure our management teams are working together well and we are all working towards the same goals. Secondly I think we need to present a positive approach to the community and work in partnership towards sustainable land management in the region. And thirdly I'd like to see a more proactive attitude of this department with the media, showing the work and achievements of our teams."

Regarding the recent robust debate over the removal of Rangers from national parks in the region and replacing them with town-based management teams, Rob Murphy says Parks and Wildlife have come on a ways since then.

"Where remoteness places a question mark over the placement of personnel, we will continue the use of the mobile teams. However we have placed permanent Rangers on Idalia and Welford National Parks and soon will have a permanent Ranger on Lochern."

Rob says the department has listened to the community on this issue and a fair compromise has been reached.

The new District Manager says his passion is land management, his interest starting during his first career in the Forestry Department in South East Queensland. This interest grew as he moved to the then Department of Natural Resources.

The main issues he sees in land management are pest control including feral animal control, "We have spent \$270,000 dollars on our parks in this District over the past two years."

Illegal grazing on National Parks in the cross hairs

He sees the management of stock control as a major issue facing the department in the immediate future, "When you fly over the parks you see the numbers of cattle grazing. This is an issue we have to face and we now have an operations plan to implement in this regard."

For the future Rob Murphy says he would like to see a full resolution of all the challenges facing land management on National Parks over the next five years. "With a particular emphasis," he says, "on maintaining staff safety over this vast and remote region."

Now that everyone's back from their well-earned leave, the team at DCQ is really getting into the swing and gearing up for a very big and exciting year.

Projects

On the project front we are really powering along. While there are still a few of the 18 National Landcare Program first round projects to be acquitted due to dry seasonal conditions, most of the 21 second round ones are going well with only a few hit by the lack of rain.

Still on the Landcare front, we were successful with our third round application and scored \$1.2 million over 3 years for the region. As soon as the funds flow through from Government we will be calling for another round of applications from the community so keep your eyes peeled for that one.

The Protecting our Future round of late last year had 13 successful applicants for a range of projects from land-type fencing, GPS mapping training, and the production of extension material, to reducing point grazing pressure through additional watering points, and erosion control. These projects have 12 months to be completed and are spread right across the region giving Protecting our Future the greatest geographic spread of all our devolved grants rounds to date.

The Blackall Shire Council have just completed a trial on the use and effectiveness on Doggone baits for the control of wild dogs on selected properties in the Blackall, Barcaldine and Tambo shires.

We'll have a full report in next month's Bulletin on this project which was funded through our Cross-Catchments Weeds and Feral Animals Initiative.

New faces

Helping to drive DCQ into this new year will be a crop of new faces along with most of the old ones.

Last year our erstwhile Cross-Catchments Weeds and Feral Animals Initiative project officer, Damo (aka Damian Byrne), parted company with us for family reasons and has returned to the NR&M fold. Also on the leavers list were: long-time Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee Coordinator, Nora Brandli (now in the sunny South Burnett with the Burnett Mary Natural Resource Management Group); our Geographic Information Officer, David Avery who has moved into his chosen field of urban planning while retaining his partying capacity; and former Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee Coordinator, Shaaron Stevenson who has returned to her native Western Australia to be an environmental officer for a mining company. We thank them for their tireless effort for our region and community and wish them well in the future.

Brett Carlsson, formerly of NR&M and EPA is our new CCW&FAI project officer. He is already out and about and making himself known across the region and ably picking up the reins of one of DCQ's flagship projects.

James Shaddick is our new Geographic Information Officer and is proving a valuable addition to

the team in the areas of Information Technology and planning, as well as information management and mapping.

With all our extra activity on the project front we welcome Project Development Officer, **Jeff Poole**. Jeff has become an integral part of the on-ground team that works so hard to deliver project support to land managers across the region.

A major aspect of the work of a regional body is to monitor and evaluate all its activities and gather and collate information to assist future land-managers to more sustainably manage their country. This information is also essential to clearly show our investors how their investment is producing benefits and results. To this end we have employed a Monitoring, Evaluation and Review officer, **Rod Ferdinands**. Rod brings a vast experience in MER to strengthen our team and streamline our reporting obligations so we can all spend more of our time servicing our community.

All this activity needs a heap of background support. Assisting in this area is **Christie Hoad**, our new Administration Trainee. Christie performs a broad range of tasks from general administration and meeting organisation to database management.

The next Desert Channels Queensland Board Meeting will be held in Longreach on the first and second of March at the Qantas Founders Museum.

Cooper Creek and Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee Update

As you will have read in the DCQ update, both of our catchment committee coordinators have departed for new challenges. We thank them for their years of tremendous effort and support they have given to us and the wider catchment communities.

Their departure was an opportune time to review the way we operate and we have taken this opportunity to rationalise the way we are supported in our work by DCQ. Therefore, Steve Wilson, DCQ's Regional Coordinator, is now coordinating both committees with support from other DCQ staff.

While both committees have been quiet over the Christmas New Year break, they will be cranking up with their initial meetings for the year to be held in April. The CCCC meeting will be in Eromanga, and the GDCC will be in Winton (dates to be announced).

Indigenous

In one of Desert Channels Queensland's most exciting initiatives, local landholders and the Traditional Owner Group are working together on a landholder initiated project to protect and manage an area of significance that was used by Aboriginal people for many years prior to today. The site appears to have provided shelter and a close supply of various

foods for perhaps a small family group.

Not only will the project protect the degradation of the site's Aboriginal cultural heritage values by feral animals, it will help to preserve the biological values. A biological survey funded by DCQ has identified some rare plant species that are specific to this particular location.

In addition to the project itself, DCQ is recording the process of consultation, interaction and partnership between the landowners and Indigenous groups on film. This will be used as a project case study as well as an example of cross-cultural, sensitivity and cooperation.

Another DCQ initiative on the Indigenous front is our Indigenous Cultural Heritage program. There is \$150,000 allocated to this program to devolve for on-ground projects aimed at the protection, renovation and management of Aboriginal sacred areas within the DCQ region. A call for applications under this program will be advertised soon so keep your eyes peeled. For more information and assistance please call David Thompson, Indigenous Facilitator on 4651 6033.

Desert Uplands News

Desert Uplands Committee starts the new year with mixed feelings. Sadly we have, farewelled our long-time Coordinator, Louise Gronold and we wish her all

the best in her future endeavours.

On a much brighter note, we have many new exciting projects being finalised and rolled out in the region. Projects that are coming up or continuing for the Desert Uplands region include Desert Steps Ahead; Landscape Linkages; Property Management Planning, and with the prospect of further Envirofund rounds, it will be a busy 2006.

Project Officer, Jeremy Hayden will begin visiting landholders in the Eastern side of the region as part of the Desert Steps Ahead project. He will provide interested landholders with information on the wide range of natural resource management tools, ideas and resources to assist them with their project work. Kerri Woodcock has been appointed to the Landscape Linkages project and flyers regarding this project will be in letterboxes soon.

Another exciting project being developed for the Desert Uplands region is Property Management Planning which aims to provide landholders with the skills and incentives to reach their property management goals.

For more information about the Desert Uplands and its projects contact the office on 07 4651 1002 or call in and see them at 39a Ash Street, Barcaldine.

THE MAJOR MITCHELL COCKATOO



ONCE SEEN NEVER FORGOTTEN ... THE EXPLOSION OF GLORIOUS PINK AND WHITE IN A LATE AFTERNOON SUN AS THE PINK COCKATOOS FLY IN FOR THEIR SUPPER. CHATTERING ON BRANCHES, GOSSIPING OVER THE DAY'S EVENTS AND FEEDING ON FALLEN SEEDS ACROSS THE RED SANDY EARTH, THE MAJOR MITCHELL OR PINK COCKATOO IS ONE OF WESTERN QUEENSLAND'S OUTSTANDING RESIDENTS. WILDLIFE TEAM STEVE, COEN AND DALY WILSON BRINGS US THE DETAILS ...

There are few sights in nature as spectacular as the Major Mitchell Cockatoo. The species was named after the explorer Sir Thomas Mitchell who was clearly impressed by the bird. He wrote: 'Few birds more enliven the monotonous hues of the Australian forest than this beautiful species, whose pink-coloured wings and glowing crest might have embellished the air of a more voluptuous region' And he was absolutely right. We live in the Queensland outback and whenever we see this species we still marvel at its colour and movement often against a harsh and dry landscape. Formally

described by Vigors in 1831, early accounts suggest the species was once more widespread. Today the true heart of this species' distribution is the arid and semi-arid interior of Australia. This article notes some of our observations of the species in the wild, its natural history and basic husbandry in captivity.

Natural History

There are two recognised subspecies C.I.leadbeateri in the east, C.I.mollis in the central

and western parts of Australia. Key distinguishing features between the two races are the C.I.mollis lacks the yellow band in the crest and has an overall paler plumage. Sexing is relatively easy: males have a dark brown eye; females have a red ringed iris. Both males and females average about 35-40cm in size.

Breeding occurs between July and January. Breeding birds are strongly territorial and will vigorously defend nest sites which are usually in eucalypts. They show strong nest site fidelity with pairs returning year after year to the same tree. Both parents share nest preparation, incubation and care of young. The incubation period for the two to four eggs is 26 days, and fledging occurs around 56 days.

This inland and arid zone dweller tends to feed mostly on the ground on grass seeds, fruits, shoots and, we believe, occasional insects. Quiet and

unassuming, this bird is nowhere as noisy as its larger cousins. It is usually seen in pairs or small parties, and will often feed in the company of other species.

On a recent trip across western Qld and NSW, we observed over 200 birds, mostly in small family groups of 3 to 5 with one flock of over 50. All these birds were feeding along the road verges on seeding scotch thistle and sunflower obviously spilt from trucks. The birds would break the stem on the seeding head then fly up to a perch and devour the seeds. This feeding behaviour was often in the company of Mallee Ringnecks (*Barnardius zonarius barnardi*) and Red-vented Blue Bonnet Parrot (*Northiella haematogaster haematorrhous*).

Near Cunnamulla we observed a small party of 20 birds feeding in stubble paddocks on discarded grain in the company of Little Corellas (*Cacatua pastinator*) and Galah (*Eolophus roseicapillus*). This feeding was out in the open and occurred well away from timber. They were clearly nervous as they fed; perhaps it was the Black Falcon (*Falco subniger*) cruising around the edges of the paddock!

Major Mitchells prefer to drink early morning and late in the day. Through the heat of the day, they will often roost quietly up and under foliage, often near water. Native and introduced paddy melons (*Cucumis myriocarpus*) and (*Citrullus colocynthus*) are great attractants of this species. These plants are drought tolerant and often germinate along roadsides; the birds seem to have the uncanny ability to know when the fruit is ripe for the taking. Their preferred habitat is lightly timbered country with Callitris pine forest, Mulga and Mallee Shrub. Tree-lined watercourses with good tree hollows

usually support healthy populations. The seed pods and cones of many of these vegetation types are relished and birds feed both in the tree and on the ground beneath when food is available.

Major Mitchells have few specific predators: no doubt birds of prey would take adults occasionally, while eggs and young would be vulnerable to large goannas such as Lace Monitors (*Varanus varius*). Carpet Pythons (*Morelia spilota*) would invade



nest hollows and take eggs and young if given the chance.

These wary birds are difficult to photograph and have a sizeable body space which means they are restless and continually on the move when being pursued by a keen photographer! The photographs of wild birds in this article were taken using a 200mm telephoto lens attached to a Canon 8 megapixel digital camera, mostly from the driver's seat of a vehicle.

Captivity

Major Mitchells are excellent captive subjects and bonded pairs usually breed quite freely. The current purchase price of around \$500 a pair is reasonable given the hardiness and longevity of the species and once pairs settle they can produce good clutches on a regular basis.

Long term pairs which have not shown any interest in breeding may be jolted into action by an aviary revamp and new and interesting nesting options.

While they are relatively common captive avian subjects, Major Mitchell Cockatoos are deserving of more recognition. The ability of these birds to survive in such a tough natural environment, and thrive in captivity, is testament to their ability to adapt to changing conditions and utilise available resources.

This species is a delight to see in the wild and to keep as an avian subject. So if you are new to aviculture, or keen to try something different, you can't lose with Major Mitchells: they won't let you down.

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Steve Wilson BAppSc is a naturalist and Desert Channels Queensland Inc Regional Coordinator working on sustainable natural resource management in remote areas of outback Queensland. His sons Coen 11 and Daly 9 are keen naturalists and have assisted in writing this article.

PROFILE: RICHARD KINGSFORD

A gnarly old Channel Country grazier was speaking at a public meeting towards the end of 2005. He was expressing his concerns over a certain government initiative that he saw as a conspiracy of governments, academics, conservationists and the outside world in general to take away his way of living. By way of some small appeasement he said, “Oh, some scientists are alright. Like Richard Kingsford, we trust him. He’s been coming to this country for years. If we didn’t trust him he’d long be at the bottom of a waterhole with a rock around his neck, that’s for sure!”

A backhanded compliment maybe, but it demonstrates the acceptance that this unassuming scientist, Richard Kingsford – now Professor Richard Kingsford, known all along the Cooper as Dr Duck – has gained with the people living in the catchments of Australia’s inland rivers. Most landholders in Western Queensland and Western New South Wales recognise this man, and have heard his quiet, clever articulations over issues relating to these rivers he has come to love. People on the Cooper, the Paroo and Macquarie Marshes know him well.

For nearly a quarter of a century Richard Kingsford has been flying the rivers and wetlands counting birds. But this is not some scientific abstraction ending up as a dust collecting thesis in a university library. Richard has long seen the important inter-relation of his bird counts with the health of the rivers and with the values of primary production on these systems.

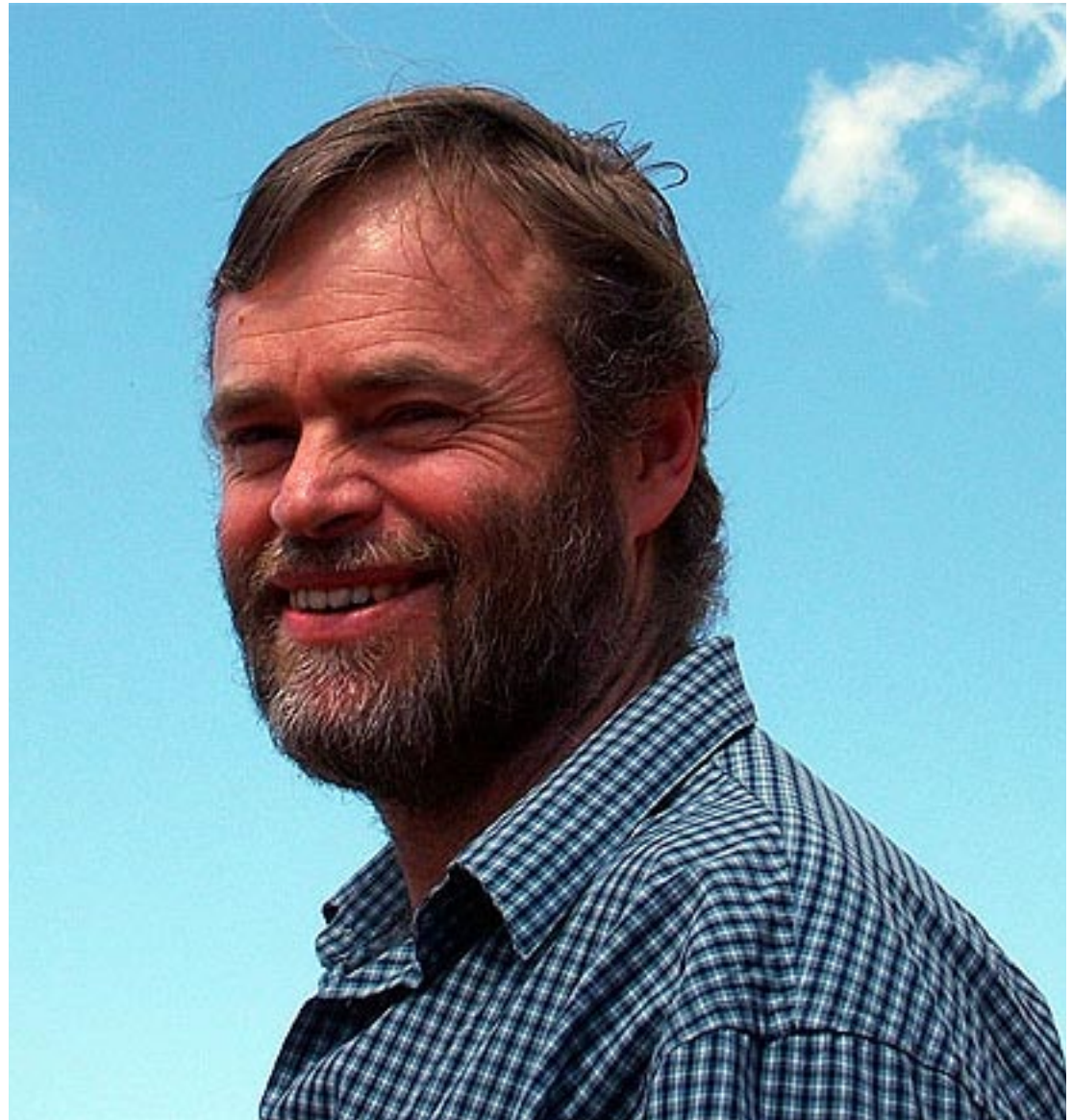
Richard Kingsford has always had a foot in both worlds: animal production and science. Growing up on a farm an hour’s drive north of Nairobi in Kenya, his grandmother introduced him to the excitement of bird watching, and living in Africa opened his eyes to the extraordinary diversity of wildlife in that country. His family emigrated to Australia when he was 12 and purchased a farm in the Southern Tablelands of New South Wales.

The wildlife of his new country seemed a little tame to the young Kingsford, “Kenya is a bit smaller than New South Wales and has 11 or 12 hundred different species of birds compared with six to seven hundred for the whole of Australia. I found Australia a very tame land ...there was nothing that would eat you or charge at you.”

His teenage years were spent mustering, marking and doing all the usual animal husbandry jobs around the farm, and the understanding that he would choose life on the land remained with Richard until he went to University.

Taking on a Bachelor of Science course at the University of Sydney, Richard describes himself as ‘a very average student’.

However, during the second year of his studies, during a field trip to western New South Wales, he was exposed to inland Australia’s amazing biodiversity.



The passion that Africa had kindled in him was reignited.

After several field trips to Western NSW, Richard told his parents he would like to attempt to sustain a career in environmental science or conservation biology, even though there were few jobs in the area at the time.

He realised he would have to extend his course a year for an Honours Degree, but advice from a lecturer gave little support for the idea. “The lecturer looked at my results and said to

me, 'I'm sorry to tell you this, but you don't have the calibre, or are the sort of person who could do Honours'."

Instead with a degree in hand, Richard took up a Masters Qualifying course and completed a Diploma of Education to give him a backup as a maths teacher. The young man, getting his act together, did better in his Masters qualifying course and in the following year enrolled in a Masters Degree – a research degree looking at wood ducks back on the family farm. Without a scholarship, between watching wood ducks and following them around, he mustered cattle and did farm and station work to survive.

After a year and a half he converted his Masters to a PhD. As soon as he completed it, he immediately gained a position with NSW Parks and Wildlife, carrying out a bird survey through the rivers of the state ... and Dr Duck was flying!

The bird survey was a visionary project driven by an increase, in the early eighties, of duck hunters in the south-east of Australia. It had been running for three years before Richard took it over and it still runs today. The young scientist was also asked by his employers to carry out a project of his own choice on the Paroo River. For the first time he studied an inland river system and fell in love with the diversity of the region. He travelled to the Paroo every three months in addition to his aerial bird surveys.

Because of his now developed expertise in aerial surveys, Richard was contracted by the South Australian Government to look at the effects of the 1990 flood in the lower Cooper and to assess the importance of the lower Cooper from Lake Hope down to Lake Eyre and Lake Blanche and the Strzelecki Creek. All of those lakes were surveyed every three months as they dried. This, with other research, resulted in Richard starting to understand the dynamics of the Cooper and its fragility. He completed the first scientific work studying Lake Eyre waterbirds and researched river flows and how often the lakes flooded.

In the mid nineties, when the plans to grow cotton on the Cooper were revealed, Richard Kingsford was invited to the Scientific Workshop at Windorah. With the

development of what became known as the Lake Eyre Basin Process – the establishment of the Lake Eyre Basin Coordinating Group and the Catchment Committees – Richard was appointed as the Science Representative on the Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee.

Richard believes the first few years were progressive as funding became available to determine what sort of work and projects were needed. But he says the Coordinating Group became too political, and wouldn't take a strong stand on issues for fear of losing project funding. "They acted too softly softly and wouldn't run on issues passed up (to them) by the Catchment Committees.

"When the Cooper Catchment Committee had resources, I think it was very effective but I don't think the Coordinating Group performed the function it should have been doing and in the end governments became

"Being able to fly over half the continent you get a pretty good idea that there aren't plenty of river systems: there's not another one over the hill. So when some of the major ones start to get knocked out it's going to have dramatic consequences on the whole ecology of the continent."

frustrated and put a stop to the Group."

The Federal Government instigated the regionalisation process which took over the distribution of funds through state-bound NRM groups – Desert Channels Queensland came into being.

"This model is ecologically most difficult to swallow in the sense that the Lake Eyre Basin crosses state borders. Under the earlier process, the Lake Eyre Basin was considered as an ecological entity within itself but state funding processes and regionalisation has broken this down."

However Richard Kingsford, as is his nature, is still optimistic, "What's so exciting and why I like to be in this process is being able to think strategically and manage a huge chunk of Australia that is ecologically connected. The great frustration is that while that ecological connection is there, it is not perhaps being realised in terms of policies and management because of state borders."

He still sees the Lake Eyre Basin river systems as being under threat from future decision making. "Despite all

the work that's been done on the Cooper and the Georgina Diamantina, and the agreements that underpin protection of river flow, they are still potentially vulnerable to the winds of change and priorities, particularly around the use of water.

"Queensland, in controlling the upstream regions of these catchments, is able to determine the future of the river systems and it has water management plans that are the primary driver for whatever will happen in the future."

"Now, if politics and people's aspirations change and it is decided to put large dams on these systems and develop them, the changes could quite easily happen through the water planning processes in Queensland."

The answer, in Richard Kingsford's belief, is perhaps the establishment of a declaration of river systems under a status similar to Canada's Heritage Rivers. Currently there is no model for Heritage Rivers agreed to by Commonwealth or the States. He says that, unlike the Wild Rivers Act in Queensland, in which the Government decides which rivers are declared – from the top down - for Heritage Rivers to work the declaration has to come from the community upwards.

"I think establishing the status of Heritage Rivers for some of these rivers would be important in terms of protecting them and ensuring their flows are protected in the future. But the decision has to come from the people, and has to include entire river systems across state borders."

Whatever governments decide in the future, Richard will be trying to guide the sustainable management of our inland rivers by working with the community and decision makers as well as injecting the knowledge that comes with his science at every opportunity.



THE COLOURS OF LIFE

JANE COLVIN IS AMONGST WESTERN QUEENSLAND'S MORE PROLIFIC ARTISTS WORKING IN PAINT AND PEN. A REGULAR COMPETITOR AT SHOWS THROUGHOUT THE REGION, JANE TODAY IS STRETCHING AN ALREADY BUSY LIFESTYLE TO COMPLETE FORTY PAINTINGS FOR HER FIRST ONE PERSON EXHIBITION TO BE HELD IN LONGREACH NEXT MONTH. HELEN AVERY BRINGS US THE STORY ...

I share coffee with Jane on the wide and cluttered verandah of the home she and Robert have built, or rather are in the process of renovating, at the Sandalwoods outside Longreach. This is the home of a busy family. I am immediately comfortable. There are books

and photographs everywhere, chairs that are meant for sitting on, tables that are meant for doing things at, sharing things over, rooms that are really lived in.

While I have come to talk to Jane about her art and her forthcoming exhibition, our conver-

sation runs and flows easily over every kind of subject matter you could imagine and the morning slips quickly into lunchtime.

Jane grew up in Western Queensland and has totally absorbed this part of the world. Living here was not a difficult decision for her and Robert and their children to make. It is where they want to be after several lifestyle and directional changes. Jane's thinking and inspiration are not limited by what she sees outside her window. At the same time Jane is definite that she couldn't paint as she does if she didn't live here. In fact she almost gave up painting when she lived elsewhere. ...there's something...she says ...about the space and the freedom...

Jane has been exposed to art from an early age. Her mother was Joy Wehl, one of the several art enthusiasts of the central west who were instrumental in the formation of Arts West, an involvement and commitment that Jane continues actively today. After school she attended Art College until drawn home to help work the drought devastated family property. It wasn't long before she was married with children of her own and swallowed up by the life of a working wife and mother running a family and a family business.

Throughout this time Jane has developed her techniques by attending Arts West schools regularly, enrolling in MacGreggor College summer and winter schools, and even taking on the challenge of a four week painting workshop in Italy.



At the moment walls, floors and beds are stacked with canvases and art works ranging from delicate water colours and line drawings to vibrantly rich and colourful landscapes. The techniques and subject matter are just as varied. It is exciting to see such versatility. As Jane says ...I just love doing it ...and her enthusiasm and skills show. You cannot take for granted that you know what this artist is going to produce. There are constant surprises. Jane is not afraid to experiment and get out of her comfort zone.

We talked about the scary side of art – the fact that the artist, in putting her art form into the



public domain – is exposing something that is intensely personal to a world that is critical or perhaps worse, careless. It is not easy.

Words and photos by Helen Avery

Jane's exhibition, "Colours of my Life", will be held in the QANTAS Founders Outback Museum gallery in Longreach from March 24th.

Twelve months ago she decided she was going to hold her first one person exhibition. The gallery space at the QANTAS Founders Museum was booked and she was committed with a time slot and a significantly large wall space to fill. While she admits to moments of sheer panic, the commitment has certainly made her work consistently to produce the forty to fifty works she feels necessary for the exhibition ... and then there's mounting, framing, pricing, cataloguing and organising the opening ... an enormous task. But she has done it.

One of the greatest difficulties of a serious artist in any field is to discipline yourself into making time available to dedicate to your particular art form. It is always too easy to find an excuse not to do it – to succumb to demands of work and family. Jane's way of overcoming this by organising a full exhibition might be extreme but it has worked. Two full days every week are put aside as her art days.

A WOBBLY PINCH

We all know the constabulary at Longreach at times gets a little keen, particularly the young police officers bent on exercising the full library of Queensland's legislation in their first week within this compliant community. One such constable couldn't believe his luck a couple of weeks ago as he watched a four wheel drive wobbling along a Longreach road. The vehicle swerved this way and that, ran off the road, back onto it, slowed down, sped up.

The young constable's eyes were bright with the chase. In these days of breath testing you're lucky to pinch a driver a few points over the legal limit, hardly drunk. But here, through the windscreen of the police vehicle is a good old fashioned drunk driver, probably lucky to be alive, wending his way home from the pub - probably had a win on the races.

The pursuit car growled as the officer planted his foot, lights flashed, sirens screamed as he quickly forced the offending vehicle to the side of the road.

The driver climbed out of the car as the officer prepared for the arrest. Expecting a slurred voice he was surprised by the bright eyes and a very un-drunk voice of a DCQ employee - "But Officer, I'm just killing cane toads!"

ROUGH REDS

By Luke Douglas

The sun beats down....It's bloody hot and we've still got miles to go,
And if you've ever worked with Santas; you'll understand; I know.
Their dragging feet get slower and their heads begin to drop,
We've only gone three hundred yards and once more we have to stop.
We cannot understand them; how they dog and fall,
And you wish you had an angry cur to lug and heel and maul.
It makes you ponder on the sense of the blokes who built the breed,
As the wing rolls ever outwards and the sweat runs off your steed.
We've only gone a half a mile, but it's two miles to the lead,
And you wish that you could sow the place East West with noxious weed.
That's how we'd beat the bastards; just sit back and crack a beer;
While we watch the tide of red rubbish break; on a crop of Pimolea
There's cattle sneaking under shade, frothing tongues are all you see,
As we fight with long lost patience, hand to hand and tree to tree.
They let on they couldn't, possibly...struggle, one more pace...
Oh, if I only had a cleaver, I'd slaughter the entire race.
But we do have little victories and revenge is sugar sweet;
Like laying into pan sized steaks of beautiful red meat.
And loading fat cows on the train, does lift this ringer's grin,
And we wish we were meat workers when the buggers rumble in.
But to keep these red dogs straight yet loose is a trick we can't discover.
So I'll just take the easy way- I'm a Brahman lover