

the **basin** **BULLET**

the voice of desert channels Queensland

next
page

exit

June 2007

old cork homestead

shines

- water in the desert
- growing good gardens
- in search of the holy grail



As I See It....

Every group or organisation seeks to be 'part' of its community; some do it better than others; some find it almost impossible.

Government falls into the latter category and nowhere more so than in the Desert Channels Region. The Desert Channels Region is the Queensland section of the Lake Eyre Basin. It is the land of big, untamed rivers, unique flora and fauna, immense landscapes, rich culture and heritage, and special people.

These children of the Basin are shaped by the landscape in which they choose to live: they are rugged, self-reliant, understated, self-effacing and resourceful ... and proudly so.

Their's is an unforgiving land that bestows great bounty, but if wronged, will quickly bare its teeth. As a consequence, the long-term land managers of the region are good at working with the land and within the strictures it imposes – despite the fact that many of them look as if they've been through more than one good scrap. They are also very good at working together as part of their community. Getting them to work with government is problematic, given their inherent mistrust of bureaucracy and politicians generally, and their reflexive bristle against the big stick.

Enter the local regional body, Desert Channels Queensland. The only reason it exists is to do a job that government can't: government can't engage effectively with the community and, therefore, can't deliver on long-term, sustainable, community-based management of our natural resources.

Because of its genesis at the behest of government, and its funding by government, DCQ was, at first, thought to be part of government, and viewed with a very jaundiced eye. Over the past two years, the pages of the Basin Bullet have championed DCQ's efforts to distance itself – in perception – from government.

Today, DCQ is firmly entrenched, working with the local community on more than 300 projects ranging in size from million dollar cross-regional initiatives to modest \$1,500 ones.

In this edition, we share two great examples of community partnership and engagement at a local level. The first shows the generosity of effort of 72 people in honouring our non-Aboriginal heritage, and cleaning up a blight on the landscape; the second is a moving, first-hand account of the honouring of our Aboriginal heritage, and placing of plaques to remember deceased Wangkangurru Elders.

We are, indeed, a community.

IN THIS ISSUE

Sharing the load: one ton per person	3
Water in the desert and the stories entwined	4
Feathers in the night: in search of the Holy Grail	5
Not you, but you: positive discrimination	5
Dirt Divas: growing good gardens	6
Claypan Boogey: Groovin' at The Grove	6
DCQ news: only some of what's been happening	7
Catchment roundup: what DU is up to	7
WaterSmart: money in smart water	8
Feral forum: working across borders	9
Review: murder and madness	10

DCQ's Regional Coordinator, and prime-mover of the Old Cork project, Steve Wilson, reports on a great weekend of cleanup, survey, companionship and yarns:

At the kind invitation of the Rob and Ros Banning, seventy-two dedicated people swarmed like ants around the Old Cork Homestead and waterhole on the Diamantina River, about 150 kilometres south-west of Winton. The recent weekend of activities began with a briefing on safety; first aid; porta loos; who's doing what; and smoko, lunch and dinner arrangements, before we really kicked into gear.

The aim of the Old Cork Waterhole, Sandhill and Homestead Project (an initiative of the Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee) was to remove rubbish and debris from around the waterhole, the building and the adjacent sand hill; conduct a flora and fauna survey of the area; and to erect interpretive signage near the old building.

The energetic team, which included a contingent of willing workers courtesy of Queensland Corrective Services, kept a bobcat, a five ton truck, and a front-end loader busy for a day and a half.

Initial work saw the piling of rubbish in heaps for removal by bobcat and truck. Any materials with heritage value were set aside; badly damaged and general rubbish was buried.

After lunch on Saturday, Dave Akers from Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service led a team of Scouts installing a series of four pitfall traps on the sand hill, as part of a fauna survey of the site, while Jenny Silcocks (Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries), Rhondda Alexander and Jan McIntyre (both members of the Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee)

recorded plant species for the flora survey.

DCQ Board member and naturalist, Angus Emmott and Fisheries Officer, Gary Muhling dropped some traps into the waterhole to see what was active, while anyone with an interest was identifying birds and anything else that moved. Chris Clague (Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service) even broke out the bat detector to see what was furry and flying about.

The highlight for the kids, and many of the adults, was the large echidna that was relocated from the building's rubble to a safer home.

The ravenous horde was kept satisfied by the sterling efforts of the Winton Four-Wheel-Drive Club whose good cheer and hospitality kept everyone in good spirits. Tea, coffee, cold drinks, salad, kebabs, steak, sausages, carrot cake and custard were the order of the day, despite the friendliness of the flies.

An impressive sunset and a few sprinkles of rain closed out the day. The Winton Four-Wheel-Drive Club fund raiser of cold beer and rum soothed the weary workers who settled down to the calming flames of a nice fire and friendly banter before hitting their swags along the banks of the mighty Diamantina River.

By early afternoon on the Sunday, the last of the happy campers had left a dramatically transformed Old Cork Homestead precinct. Over the day and a half the team had:

1. collected over 70 tons of rubbish from the immediate homestead site and the surrounding 50 hectares and buried it;
2. levelled and tidied 2 hectares of unsightly gravel heaps and holes;
3. cut down and removed five Athel pines;
4. erected three interpretive signs;

5. conducted a flora survey that identified and recorded 48 plant species around the homestead area and 58 on the adjacent sand hill; and

6. conducted a fauna survey that identified and recorded 26 birds, 11 mammals, 2 reptiles, 2 butterflies, 4 fish, and one freshwater shrimp.

The effort of these volunteers has restored a degraded site in a significant landscape. The site has high visitation through the tourist season and from local community and, with the installation of signage, will improve the understanding, education and awareness of visitors.

The project proved beyond doubt that, in the DCQ region, community collaboration and partnership are alive and well, and above all, effective in getting a difficult job done. It's a credit to all those who participated over the weekend.



Part of the hardworking crew in front of the cleaned-up site



Steve Wilson and John Clemments with the newly erected signage in front of the historic Old Cork Homestead



Caring Community members cleaning up debris at Cork

A small group of dedicated people recently mounted plaques at deceased Wangkangurru Elders' places of birth – their country – to give their spirits a final resting place. Seven plaques were placed in the Simpson Desert National Park at three different Mikirris (native wells). The creation of these water wells across the desert is part of the Wangkangurru people's 'Two-Boys Dreaming'. Each Mikirri belonged to a different clan member who cared for that particular well. This was where they were born and where they grew up; it was their special place ... The placing of the plaques was a moving experience as Wangkangurru Elder, Don Rowlands writes:

The return to country of the plaques by family descendants was well represented, and everyone felt proud of their efforts in honoring their ancestors.

The ceremony and prayers were an emotional time for all as everyone felt the placement of the plaques was more of a burial, which augmented the significance of this project.

"My emotions got the better of me as I considered the placement more as a burial; I remembered my grandmother and how much she cared for me; it is a very special and good thing to be doing and I would like to thank all involved in this project." ... Shirley Hooky, nee Naylor

A total of seven plaques were placed in the desert at three different Mikirris: Tjilpatha, Yelkerri and Puramuni. These sites were chosen collectively by family members who directed the work detail, formal procedures and prayers.

"After all these years working in the desert this is the first time that I really felt at home. It has been a very moving and significant moment for me and it was a delightful experience to be involved with my great mother's return to country." ... Ashley Rowlands

The placement of the plaques in the Simpson Desert National Park was a very touching moment for all who took part. It was an emotional, special and rewarding occasion for everyone involved in this exceptional project, and the eventual placement of the plaques. The plaques pay tribute to the memory of our deceased elders as a result of returning them to the country of their birth and to commemorate their place in the memory of the younger generation with reference to country where they've lived for thousands of years, in particular the Mikirri's which are very special places for the Wangkangurru people.

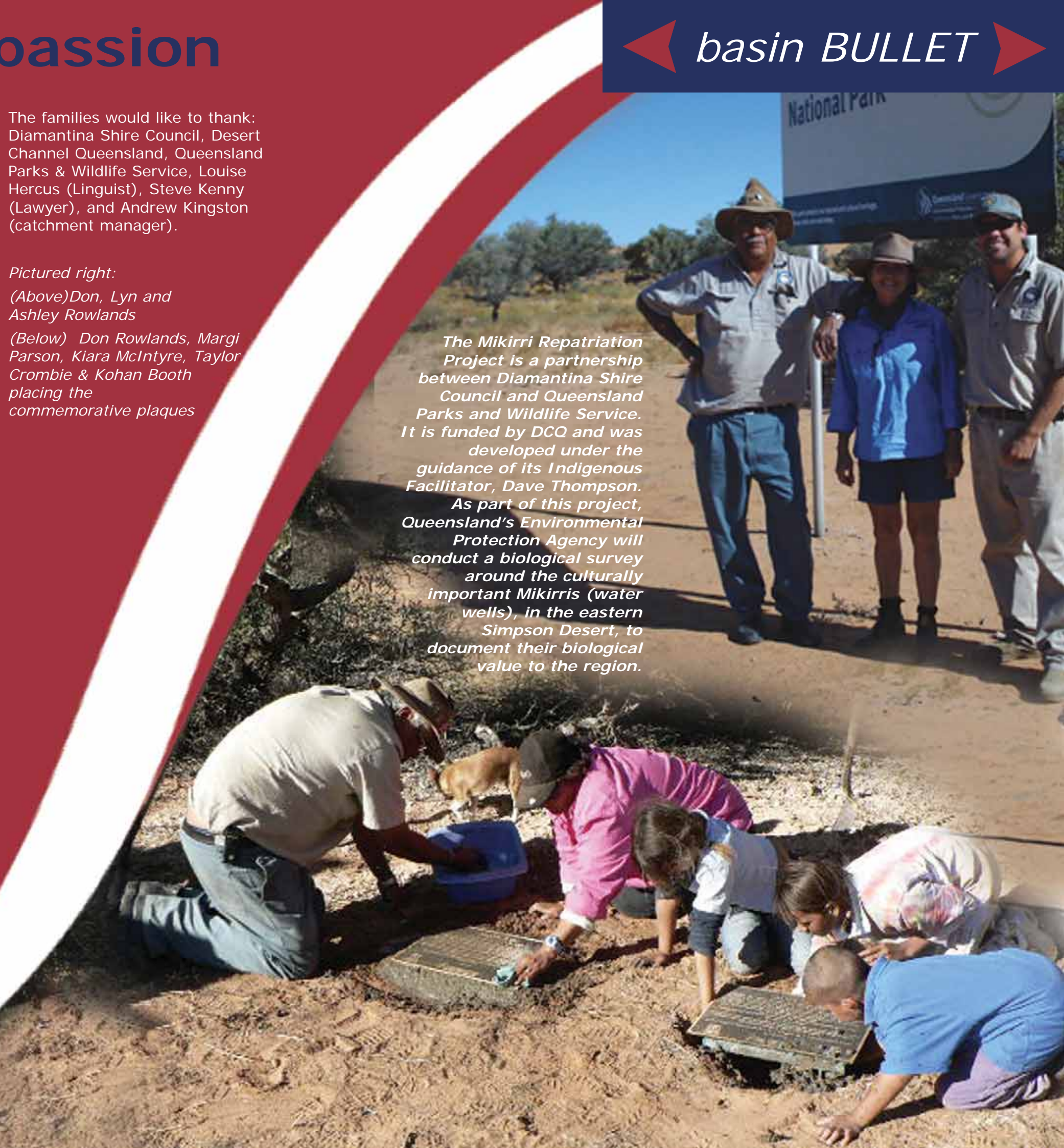
The families would like to thank: Diamantina Shire Council, Desert Channel Queensland, Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service, Louise Hercus (Linguist), Steve Kenny (Lawyer), and Andrew Kingston (catchment manager).

Pictured right:

(Above) Don, Lyn and Ashley Rowlands

(Below) Don Rowlands, Margi Parson, Kiara McIntyre, Taylor Crombie & Kohan Booth placing the commemorative plaques

The Mikirri Repatriation Project is a partnership between Diamantina Shire Council and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. It is funded by DCQ and was developed under the guidance of its Indigenous Facilitator, Dave Thompson. As part of this project, Queensland's Environmental Protection Agency will conduct a biological survey around the culturally important Mikirris (water wells), in the eastern Simpson Desert, to document their biological value to the region.



the
holy grail



A group of fanatics, from all parts of Australia, recently met to further their obsession with the Holy Grail of hard-core ornithologists, the Night Parrot.

The second of May meeting was held in DCQ's Longreach conference room and attracted prominent scientists and senior conservation staff from around Australia, both in person and via teleconference. The catalyst was the recent discovery by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service staff of reasonably fresh night parrot remains in the Diamantina National Park.

Mutual interest in improving knowledge and understanding of the night parrot was what brought these people together, but they also discussed ways of enhancing current communication between organisations, and the potential to develop a national night parrot project.

Across Australia, many organisations have undertaken a range of night parrot research. This has included field surveys, literature reviews, examination of museum collections and, most excitingly, Geographic Information System (GIS) modelling.

The GIS modelling examines and rates bird sightings by analysing the state of landscape at the time, rainfall, fire, habitat type and a range of other factors that might relate to the presence of the birds.

To date there has been some solid evidence of birds being seen in areas of western Queensland and Western Australia's Pilbara. The GIS modelling is looking at, not so much where to find birds, but when. It attempts to identify the best time to potentially see birds, and which landscape events offer the opportunity for them: is it seeding spinifex, short sharp rainfall, fire events, or something else.

One of the challenges we face when dealing with a highly mobile, nocturnal and cryptic species, is the need for someone to be able to activate a rapid response and be a 'go to' person when a bird is seen or suspected.

Night Parrot Meeting:

Leo Joseph (National Wildlife Collection), Andrew Kingston (Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS)) – obscured, Rob Murphy (QPWS), Vanessa Bailey (Environmental Protection Agency), Chris Cague (QPWS), and Steve Wilson (DCQ) huddled around the conference phone to speak with others around Australia.



The meeting was united in the need to have a person driving a night parrot database, and be mobile and ready to act as required.

The key outcome of the Longreach gathering was the formation of the National Night Parrot Network which will be a forum for scientists and researchers to help further our knowledge of the species. Leo Joseph, Director Australian National Wildlife Collection in Canberra heads this network, and has been heard to declare: 'I'm not dying until I've seen a live specimen'.

The National Night Parrot Network will also be trying to get funding for someone to drive the night parrot effort across Australia.

positive
discrimination

Can discrimination be acceptable when it is for the greater good? Desert Channels Queensland believes so when it is part of a positive investment in the future of the whole region.

As part of this investment in the future, Desert Channels Queensland is giving three highly motivated and energetic young land-carers the opportunity to attend the upcoming State Landcare Conference in Mackay.

DCQ's third annual Landcare Bursary is part of an ongoing commitment to Landcare in the region, which covers a third of Queensland, and this year, people between 18 and 35 are being targeted.

'People first' is the core tenet of the Longreach-based natural resource management group, and, for the third year running, DCQ is offering assistance to people involved in Landcare in the region to attend the annual State Landcare Conference.

Since 2004, DCQ has reignited Landcare groups within its region with the injection of more than \$1.5 million from the National Landcare Program.

But, as DCQ Executive Officer, Leanne Kohler says, it is about more than simply putting money on the ground for project work. "We believe that our people are the most important resource we have," Leanne says, "especially our young people."

"They're the future of our region, and giving them the opportunity to increase their skills, knowledge and networks is probably more important than providing funds for project work."

This year, DCQ is providing three bursaries, to the value of \$1,000 each, to cover conference registration, travel and accommodation. Interested people must be between 18 and 35, and need to lodge a simple nomination form stating why they would like to attend the conference and what benefits they would bring back to Landcare in their community.

"Ours is a community-based organisation," Leanne says, "and we have been highly successful in sourcing funds and engaging our community in the cooperative, strategic management of our natural resources."

"We believe that any investment in the young people of our region is a wise investment in the future."

Dirt Divas

Project Officer Jeff Poole reports on his series of highly successful and extremely well-attended workshops on how to grow great gardens without a lot of water:

As I packed the car to the gunwales with workshop kits, projectors, computers and other bits of paraphernalia needed to run a workshop, I wondered again if it was worth the effort; would it really make a difference.

I flicked the ignition and began the early morning trip to the final workshop in Blackall. Having covered Winton, Longreach, Barcaldine and Jundah over four days, I was getting good at moving my little 'travelling troupe' around the region. This included Lawrie Smith, an award winning garden designer who's work is well known in the region, Mike Chuk who has both a scientific credentials and practical experience, and Jeff Conaghan who has years of experience in botanical gardens. All this knowledge and experience was enriched by local garden divas Elisabeth Clark, Lindy Hardy, Jocelyn Chandler, Shelley Dark, Ness Bailey, Belinda Colquhoun and Mary Emmott.

The first four workshops were a resounding success with more than 200 people attending, and hopefully a large number would make use of the information provided. But would there be significant interest for this final workshop.

Any concerns over this last workshop were soon allayed as I pulled up at the venue. It was half an hour before we were due to start and I was hard pressed to get a decent park; as I walked into the hall, there was a buzz like walking into a flock of galahs.

While I would like to say they were excited by my presence, I have to admit it was their passion for gardening heightened by the chance to win a garden makeover to the value of \$10,000! Little did the attendees at Blackall know that one of them would be the ultimate winner.

As part of its Wise Urban Water Use project (a Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee initiative), DCQ has run the series of workshops to show people how to have vibrant, attractive gardens while using a minimum amount of water. Living in a harsh environment, it is important that we have a place of escape and refuge in our gardens, but we need to maintain this in the most water efficient manner possible.

There are many issues that gardeners face and we spent nearly a full day addressing most of them, and I know that most of the people attending could have gone on well into the night.

We dealt with:

- *water, and issues associated with different water supplies, particularly salinity;*
- *different soil types, and how they interact with your water to influence pH;*
- *irrigation, including how to deliver it to plants without losing it to evaporation, or down the drain;*
- *plant selection, garden design and mulching.*

It was all rounded off nicely with inspiration from local garden divas.

I'd like to thank everyone for attending the five workshops and let you know that we hope to run more in the future, so please let us know if you are interested.

By the way, Veronica Driver's entry was drawn at the DCQ Board meeting on Wednesday 6th June. The squeal of excitement on the other end of the line when I rang to tell her made all the work involved in the workshops seem worthwhile. The DCQ team will now descend like a hoard of locusts for a weekend to transform her garden ... and we'll show you the results here.

Pictured left: Jeff Poole and Veronica Driver holding up the winning entry



groovin' at the GROVE

Over thirty landholders, Winton Shire staff, and representatives from DCQ, Barcoo Shire, DOW Agriculture Industries, Department of natural Resources and Water, and QPWS got into the groove of weed control on the 25th May.

The informative field day at David and Maree Jones's Winton district property, The Grove, was hosted by Desert Channels Queensland and Winton Shire Council, and showcased practical weed control methods.

Discussion and demonstrations centred on a range of mechanical and chemical approaches including: a D7 Dozer and All-Wheel-Drive tractor pulling a large chain; tractor mounted spray- mister; DCQ's tray-back mounted Quick Spray Unit; a Quad Bike mounted spray unit; and the use of Graslan pellets from aircraft and by hand. Each control measure was put through its paces on a range of prickly acacia, both large and small. Issues such as time, cost per tree, fuel used, chemical type and delivery method were put under the microscope by attendees.

At midday a sumptuous barbecue lunch was provided by the capable mother and daughter team, Amanda and Bronwyn Searle.

Afterwards, there was more discussion and several competitions to determine the cost of spraying trees.

This field day, a credit to all who contributed, follows up on another highly successful one held two years ago, and the good attendance reflects the ongoing interest in woody weed control.



If you're a workshop or field day junkie, then you've had plenty to gorge on around the region recently:

1. our Project Officer, Jeff Poole did a great job in planning and running five garden diva workshops that attracted more than 200 keen gardeners (see *Dirt Divas*);
2. in conjunction with Winton Shire Council, we hosted another well-attended and highly-successful field day at The Grove (see *Groovin' at The Grove*);
3. our Regional Coordinator, Steve Wilson pulled together a great community clean-up weekend as part of the Old Cork Waterhole, Sandhill and Homestead Project (see *Corker at Old Cork*);
4. the five 'How to Win Funds and Influence Panels' workshops organised by our Landcare Facilitator, Cameron O'Neil, and run by Landcare Queensland's Sam Morris, were well attended by a broad range of those interested in applying for funding – not only landholders; and
5. the Back on Track workshop – hosted in our conference room – that looked at rare and threatened species in the DCQ region, identified threatening processes, identified data deficiencies, and identified actions that would help and what is beyond doing.

Coming up is a Channel Country Grazing Land Management workshop in Windorah on the 2nd and 5th of July. This is limited to 15 participants so contact John Targett on 07 46 584471 to book your place.

The DCQ Conference Room was also the venue for a meeting that saw the formation of the National Night Parrot Network (see *Holy Grail*).

Two of our Indigenous projects, under the auspices of Dave Thompson, our Indigenous Facilitator, are well advanced:

1. plaques placed in the Mikirri Repatriation Project out of Birdsville (see *Parks, plaques and passion*);
2. building is completed and awaiting the repatriation of remains in the Iningai Keeping Place Project in Longreach; and
3. James Newman, Project Support Officer Traditional Knowledge Recording Project has received his equipment, and is now rolling out training in participating Traditional Owner groups. Recording has also commenced in the Urandangi and Dajarra areas.

One to look out for is our first anniversary bash: a celebration of twelve months in our own building, with our own identity, and right in the middle of town ... almost. We'll keep you posted on this one but look out for it around October.

Not only is DCQ successfully delivering multi-million dollar project funding across a third of the State, we are investing and partnering in cross-border projects. The latest of these is the Camel Collaring and Tracking Project being run in north-west South Australia by a consortium of regional bodies, research organisations, and government departments across three states and the Northern Territory.

Finally, on a sad note, the DCQ Board has farewelled a staunch, hard-working, foundation member in Bill Bode of The Plains, Prairie. Bill's commitment to local government and his own business has seen him reluctantly resign his position on the DCQ Board. The management and staff wish you well, Bill.



Desert Uplands Committee

The Desert Uplands Committee's Hannah Whiteaker reports on one of their current initiatives:

The Desert Uplands Committee successfully ran a stewardship tender to protect remnant vegetation and areas of biodiversity significance by creating the foundation for Landscape Linkage across the Desert Uplands bioregion.

A tender was run whereby landholders bid to provide ecosystem services over volunteered areas of land, in return for annual incentive payments. Fifteen landholders signed two year management agreements with the Desert Uplands Committee to maintain or improve the condition of selected areas. This now conserves over 85,000 hectares in the southern Desert Uplands bioregion.

These protected linkage areas ensure that the biodiversity and land condition is of high enough quality to maintain the natural flora and fauna values of these ecosystems for the duration of the agreement. These agreements only reward land management that is above legal 'duty of care' requirements.

The Landscape Linkage stewardship tender is the first trial of an environmental stewardship program in Central Western Queensland.

A multiple-round tender process was used – with very competitive bidding taking place amongst several landholders. The Desert Uplands Committee was overwhelmed by the amount and types of vegetation offered.

Payments are made annually on the provision of evidence of the maintenance or improvement of condition at the end of each dry season.

Funding for future stewardship programs are being sought by the Desert Uplands Committee as the local response to this initiative was so strong. These programs will allow landholders to be rewarded for good biodiversity management of remnant vegetation. Good biodiversity management in many instances parallels nicely with good production systems.

Biodiversity stewardship programs give landholders the recognition they deserve when it comes to delivering tangible benefits for the environment. This tender process also ensures that public funds are spent obtaining maximum benefits for positive environmental outcomes.



Desert Uplands project officer & landholder conducting a biodiversity field assessment

money in smart water

While high fuel prices, drought conditions and low staff retention are issues many graziers face on a daily basis, Channel Country manager, Anthony Desreaux, is thinking outside the square to boost his bottom line.

The manager of NAPCo's Monkira Station is expecting WaterSmart Pastoralism™ to not only save on fuel, vehicle running costs and staff time, but to make a real difference to the amount of water he uses on the property.

Desert Channels Queensland is a partner in this three year research project that aims to improve stock management, control total grazing pressure and pastoral country condition, and hosts the project officer Colleen James in its Longreach office.

Colleen James says the project helps pastoralists to increase profitability and sustainability through better water management practices using new water storage, delivery and monitoring technologies.

"How we deliver water to stock and how we manage our watering points can have a big impact on the operation of our business," she says. "It can effect the condition of our country and the sustainability of our enterprise.

"There are so many new technologies and ideas to help landholders use water more efficiently, but it's hard to know what might work in different situations and what is worth investing in. WaterSmart™ provides an opportunity for graziers to find out what would work for them."

Monkira Station is one of three case study demonstration sites across inland Australia. The sites have been chosen to reflect a variety of situations including: infrastructure and grazing scales; sheep and cattle properties; ranges and channel country; and company and family enterprises.

"This allows us to compare and contrast different situations and gives us a broader base to inform our recommendations," says Colleen. "The sites show the benefits of upgrading to a better property-wide water management system and allow other landholders to see the infrastructure in operation through field days."

On Monkira Station new infrastructure has been installed including Grundfos solar pumps, new water points with Dinocrete troughs, an E-Vap Cap evaporation control cover, and an Enviro-Liner for seepage control (both supplied by Darling Downs Tarpaulins).

The new infrastructure and 10 water points are all being monitored remotely with the Observant telemetry system. This system can be tailored to individual needs and is currently monitoring evaporation cover and troughs with a camera; logging water levels, flow rates and rain gauges; and allowing remote control of both solar and diesel pumps.

"The new infrastructure is being monitored for time and cost-savings involved in the changeover," Colleen says. "We are also recording any lifestyle and business changes, and documenting how reliable and easy the new technologies are to use and maintain."

For more information please contact Colleen James on 07 4652 7826 or colleen.james@dcq.org.au

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To find out more on technologies available for stock watering, demonstration sites, live forum and much more on WaterSmart™ go to www.desertknowledgecrc.com.au/watersmart.

WaterSmart Pastoralism™ is a Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (DK CRC) Project, funded by the National Landcare Program, administered by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). Project partners are: Desert Channels Queensland Inc. (DCQ); the South Australian Arid Lands Natural Resource Management Board (SAAL NRM); the Northern Territory Department of Primary Industries; Fisheries and Mines (NT DPIFM); E P Windmills & Pumps; Stokcrete Troughs; Mono pumps; Bushman's Tanks; and Stockman's Telemetry.

Pictured from left to right: Installing seepage liner, solar panel, pump and Telemetry at Monkira



feral forum

working across borders

More than a dozen feral people from industry and government gathered at a recent Regional Pest Management Forum at Desert Channels Queensland's Longreach office to share their knowledge and expertise on weed and feral animal control.



DCQ's Pest Management Coordinator Brett Carlsson says the two day meeting saw interest from South Australia, Northern Territory and New South Wales as well as Queensland.

"The DCQ region shares borders with three states and the Territory so it was great to get people from all areas in the one room to share experience and look at ways of future coordination of effort," says Brett.

A forum of this type was identified, through DCQ's Cross Catchment Weeds and Feral Animals Initiative, as a positive way of moving forward with pest management issues across the Lake Eyre Basin.

As Brett repeatedly emphasised, weeds and ferals don't stop at lines on the map. "If we don't control our weeds, they end up down the rivers into South Australia," he points out. "And if the Territory doesn't take care of the eastern Barkly, we end up with it.

"The far western slice of New South Wales flows in South Australia so that's the way the weed seed and the feral animals go, which makes it pretty obvious that control measures have to be built around cross-border cooperation."

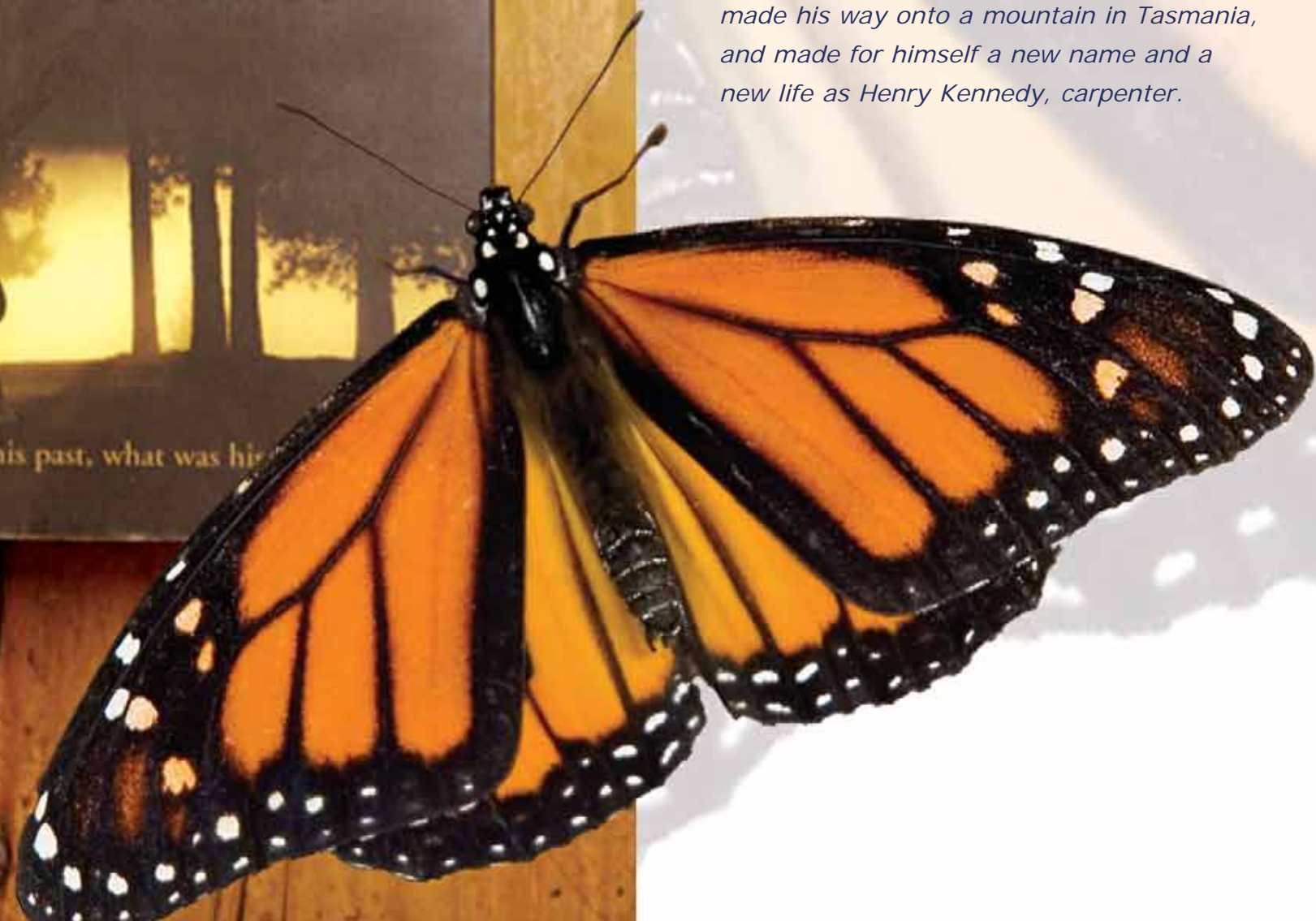
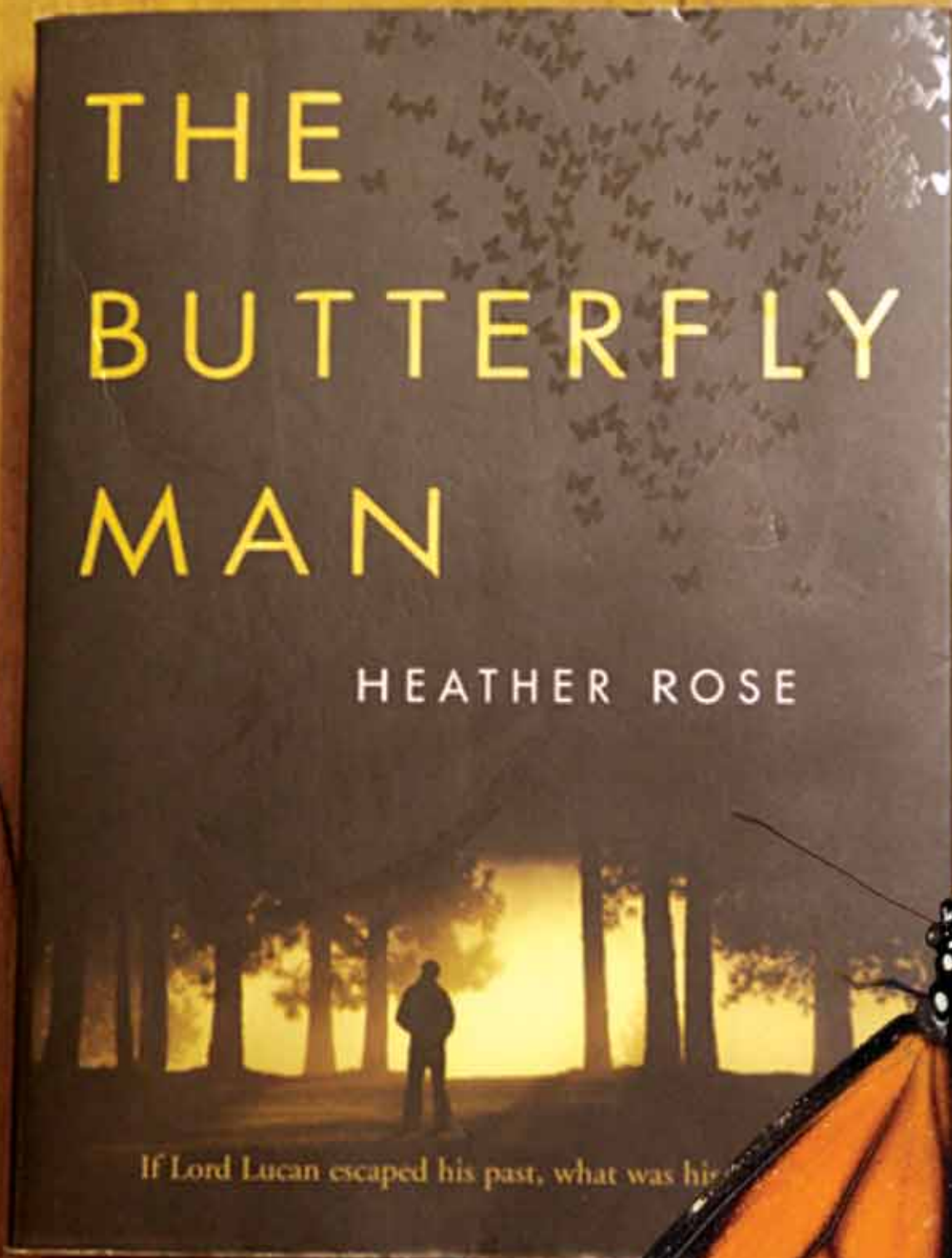
Among the issues discussed over the two days were cross-border camel control, awareness-raising activities for all stakeholders, and the need for a comprehensive list of who to contact for advice on weeds and feral animals in each state. DCQ has offered to collate the contacts into a single list covering the whole of the Lake Eyre Basin.

A short field trip to inspect a snake cactus infestation north of Longreach sparked some lively conversation. They saw, first-hand, what can happen when these succulent species are disposed of incorrectly and left unchecked. The attendees, who work with a wide range of stakeholders at the control and implementation levels of pest management, left Longreach motivated to get on top of plants they know about before they become a big problem.

Brett says, "It was a very successful meeting and we're going to make it an annual event to keep everyone up to date on pest management issues, and exchange ideas on a regular basis.



Book Review



When this book was lent to me, I didn't recognise the author's name, didn't really recall much about the crime it is based on, and wasn't all that excited about reading a work of 'faction' – fiction based on some fact. But, being someone who'll read the back of the cornflakes packet if there's nothing else around, I dived in and, gosh, what a totally unexpected gem of a novel. The Butterfly Man is one of those books that you finish, close, and say a quiet 'wow'.

It is based on the sensational Lord Lucan case in which John Bingham, 7th Earl of Lucan, is believed to have viscously murdered his family's nanny, and then disappeared. The author, Heather Rose, asks what would happen if he had actually made his way onto a mountain in Tasmania, and made for himself a new name and a new life as Henry Kennedy, carpenter.

As the story unfolds, Henry is diagnosed with a brain tumour, and he embarks on the journey of dying, and a struggle with a compromise between saying goodbye, closure and the truth.

The author entwines Henry's story with flashbacks to his previous hedonistic life, and the murder itself. You are never told if the main character actually did commit the murder – a fact which I applaud. A friend and I came to totally different conclusions on that idea. The jump of identity is very believable, and you almost wonder if Heather Rose had access to genuine clues which led her to write this story.

It is described by some reviewers as a crime novel, but it is so much more. The novel deals with the issues of transformation, and concealing and revealing aspects of your life to the ones you love.

Heather Rose's writing is wonderful, almost lyrical, and this novel has the most beautifully written death scene I have ever read.

The Butterfly Man won the Davitt Award for best crime novel by an Australian woman in 2005, and has also been nominated for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award this year.

I look forward to more novels from this great Australian talent.

The Butterfly Man by Heather Rose – University of Queensland Press, 2005.

Desert Channels Queensland is funded by the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust