

# NaRLA News



Nature Refuge Landholders' Association - Queensland Inc. ACN 64 002 626 445

~ Dedicated to the establishment and management of a network of nature refuges for the benefit of the land, wildlife and the community ~



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*...and much more!*

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## FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Welcome to our third and final issue of the NaRLA newsletter for this year. The next issue will be in January 2007.

This has been a solid four months for NaRLA, with the most significant events being the replacement of James Purtil as Director General of the EPA by Mr Terry Wall, receipt of invitations to tender for NatureAssist funding by all 40 of our members who sought NaRLA's support and assistance with their NatureAssist projects, NaRLA's receipt of approval for Australian Government Envirofund Round 8 funding for Nature Refuge landholders' projects, new research connections being forged with Queensland universities, and the signature of formal Memoranda of Understanding between NaRLA and the members of our team of Preferred Service Providers. More information about these issues appear in this newsletter.

Also in this issue, we have the second in a series of articles on Soil Health from Gwyn Jones, which graphically describes the 'war zone' under our feet. The graphics don't do the reality justice, so you'll need to use your imagination to picture the seething armies as they ebb and flow in the field of battle!

Comments heard around the traps over recent months suggest that there are some serious misconceptions out there

about who NaRLA is and what we are all about. For those interested in the facts straight from the horse's mouth, the article NaRLA: a 'one-stop-specialist-shop' for nature conservation support on Page 2 should clarify things. A list of the full suite of services NaRLA can provide to landholders and others interested in nature conservation on private lands is on Page 3.

NaRLA's Annual General Meeting will be held in Brisbane on Saturday 2nd December. The election of our Management Committee for the next year will be held at the AGM. If you are a financial NaRLA member and would like to be part of the team guiding your Association for the next year, please read the enclosed election information.

Fire is an ever-present concern to all landholders, and, given the current and projected weather patterns, threat of fire can only be expected to increase. Consequently, NaRLA is working with fire management specialists from the Fire and Biodiversity Consortium based at Griffith University to design and run a series of fire management workshops around Queensland for Nature Refuge and other interested landholders. See the notice on page 5 for further information.

**Marta Hardeman**  
President

**NaRLA's capacity to represent and serve the interests of landholders depends on a strong membership.**

**YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THAT STRENGTH.**

**If you are not already a member, use the enclosed membership application form to join now!**



## NaRLA: A 'ONE-STOP SPECIALIST-SHOP' FOR NATURE CONSERVATION SUPPORT

### **Landholders helping themselves**

When I was a kid growing up on stations in western Queensland, how often did I hear my Dad say: "If you want a job done properly, when you want it done, do it yourself!"? Regrettably, nothing much has changed. That is why a group of Queensland landholders got together and formed NaRLA!

Nature Refuge and other private landholders who are committed to managing their land, either solely for nature conservation purposes, or in a way that facilitates compatible use of their land for both nature conservation and income generation, have special support needs. These needs are best provided by individuals and organisations that have an intimate understanding of not only the technical aspects of the special land management needs, but also the financial, social and other everyday needs of the landholders they are supporting.

NaRLA was formed and is managed by landholders themselves specifically to ensure that an organisation with this intimate and broadly-based understanding exists, and that its prime purpose is to provide the support required to assist its members and other landholders to meet their nature conservation and related goals. As a truly independent organisation managed by its members for its members, NaRLA can get on with the job of supporting its constituency in the manner that our constituency wants and needs to be supported, without having to submit to the constantly changing political and other agendas to which those without

our independence and specific focus are subject.

We also have the advantage of access to creative and innovative methods of management and service delivery, the outstanding operational and financial success of which have been clearly proven over two decades of use in a highly demanding international service delivery business. One of the key features of this operational model is the ease and rapidity with which it can be adapted and refined to meet the special and ever-fluctuating demands of any service delivery operation, anywhere — a rare, probably unique, thing in the fields of nature conservation and land management!

### **Comprehensive service provision**

NaRLA's primary goal is to ensure prompt access by our members and other landholders to high quality advisory, environmental assessment and monitoring, on-ground works, and education and training services to make it as easy as possible for them to plan, implement, manage, and monitor the outcomes of their nature conservation and associated activities on their land.

To provide this service, NaRLA has established a very carefully selected service delivery team with the broad range of specialised experience and expertise necessary to provide a one-stop-specialist-shop for its members and other Queensland landholders who are seeking assistance in their land and nature conservation management endeavours. A detailed list of the comprehensive range of services available from NaRLA appears on page 3.

NaRLA also provides a special support service for landholders seeking Commonwealth, State and other grant funding for nature conservation projects on their properties. This service is designed to relieve landholders of the pressure on their time, effort and other resources necessary in selecting, designing, planning, recruiting service providers who can be confidently relied upon to do the job properly, obtaining quotations, and otherwise organising the projects for which funding is being sought; preparing grant applications or tenders; and managing the implementation of the projects for which landholders have received grant support.

### **Complementation and augmentation of other agencies' services**

It is self-evident that if NaRLA is to achieve desired conservation management and related outcomes in the most efficient

and cost-effective manner, we should not waste our resources by supplying services that are already readily available, *when landholders need them*, from the EPA, DNRMW, DPI, NRM groups, Landcare groups, the Land for Wildlife program, or others whose responsibility it is to provide land management support services to landholders. NaRLA's policy is to devote our service delivery and other support resources to complementation and augmentation of the resources available from these other agencies and groups. Our goals are co-operation and co-ordination, not wasteful duplication or senseless and destructive competition.

This type of progressive working relationship between NaRLA and these other agencies will maximise the availability, accessibility, quality, timeliness and usefulness of service delivery to landholders, and minimise waste of money and other resources caused by duplication or poor co-ordination of the delivery of the support services by all parties concerned. Consequently, it is NaRLA's policy to seek and very strongly encourage such co-operation and co-ordination to the maximum extent possible.

Of course, the greatest and most important beneficiaries of such a patently sensible and responsible approach to the management of the delivery of land and nature conservation management services in Queensland will be the landholders, whose success depends upon the quality and efficiency of those services!

### **Research and education**

Another unusual feature of NaRLA's operations is the integration, at every opportunity, of research and education objectives into the planning and delivery of nature conservation support services to landholders. This provides opportunities, very rarely taken up by others in the past, to learn and understand more about the ecosystems on private lands in Queensland, and how they can be managed most effectively to ensure enhanced and sustainable nature conservation and other land use outcomes. Thus, the long-term benefits or otherwise of our land use practices can be properly assessed and management practices modified where necessary to ensure positive outcomes and avoid waste of money, time and other resources by repeating projects or continuing management practices that, may be in fact, ineffectual or even counter-productive.

An example of the integration of ongoing research into basic conservation

management projects in order to expand the long-term values of the projects, and make future projects more efficient and cost-effective, is the inclusion by NaRLA and a number of Nature Refuge landholders of a co-ordinated series of post-project monitoring programs as integral parts of projects for which NatureAssist funding is being sought from the EPA. The news item *NaRLA joining international biodiversity research consortium* on page 5 describes another example of our commitment to the use of research as a tool to help facilitate effective nature conservation on private lands.

NaRLA is very much aware that effective long-term nature conservation and its advantages, and its successful integration with other forms of land use by private landholders of all types, depends to a very large extent on wide-spread and effective public education. Decisions effecting the quality and sustainable use of our natural environment are made by politicians at all

levels of government, businesses of all types and sizes, developers, and by all sections of the general public. Consequently, NaRLA seeks to use its unique and specialised pool of expertise to provide educational and training opportunities to anyone—whether they be farmers, scientists, teachers, land-developers, eco-tourists, general nature lovers, or people off the street—who is interested in learning more about our natural environment, how we can manage it better on private lands, and the benefits of such improved management. The more people, from as many backgrounds as possible, who are provided with access to opportunities to learn about and understand, in a practical setting and in an interesting manner, the importance of the quality and sustainability of our natural environment, the greater the benefits reaped in the future by the wider community from well-informed decision-making on matters affecting the environment.

### **Where our money comes from and goes to**

NaRLA is a not-for-profit incorporated Association with charitable institution, income tax exemption and deductible gift recipient status.

Sources of funding for our service delivery, educational, and research activities include membership fees, donations, sponsorships, grants, and income from sale of some of our services.

All of our service delivery, educational and research activities are devoted directly or indirectly to the understanding, promotion and facilitation of nature conservation and natural biodiversity on private lands. Our legal status dictates that none of our income from any source may be used for any purpose other than to further these objectives.

**Doug MacLennan**  
NaRLA

## LIST OF NaRLA'S SERVICES AND THE REGIONS IN WHICH THEY ARE AVAILABLE

### **1. Advice to landholders on:**

- Cropping management
- Soil conservation
- Pasture management
- Sustainable land use management
- Nature conservation and biodiversity management
- Natural land management systems (organic and biodynamic farming)
- Vegetation management
- Water quality and conservation
- Weed management
- Drainage
- Pest management
- Degraded land rehabilitation
- Use of pesticides
- Re-vegetation
- Soil health management
- Property management planning
- Use of fertilisers
- Business management
- Fire management
- Rural income diversification

### **2. Assessment of the environmental status of land including:**

- Soil health
- Pest status
- Soil erosion and conservation
- Weed status
- Effects of land use practices on land quality

- Effects of land use practices on native flora and fauna
- Flora surveys
- Fire hazard
- Fauna surveys
- Historical and cultural heritage
- Natural biodiversity surveys

### **3. Monitoring the efficacy of landholders' management of their land in respect to:**

- Soil health
- Fire hazard reduction
- Productivity
- Enhancement of native flora populations
- Resource sustainability
- Enhancement of native fauna populations
- Rehabilitation of degraded land
- Enhancement of natural biodiversity
- Re-vegetation
- Weeds
- Riparian stabilisation
- Pests
- Water quality and conservation
- Protection of threatened native species

### **4. Delivery of on-ground works services.**

- Re-vegetation
- Rehabilitation of degraded land
- Weed control

- Fencing
- Pest control
- Track construction

### **5. Regions where services can be delivered**

- South East Queensland
- Capricorn Coast
- North Queensland
- Wide Bay Burnett
- Central Highlands
- Far north Queensland
- South West Queensland
- Central west Queensland
- North West Queensland

### **6. Education and training programs**

NaRLA provides both standard programs and programs custom-designed to meet the specifications of groups of people with a particular common interest, ranging from your local natural history club to academic programs for groups of students from overseas universities. Groups or individuals interested in educational or training programs at any level on any of the topics listed in 1, 2, 3, or 4 above, or any other aspect of biology or ecology, should contact NaRLA for further information. NaRLA's basic education and training philosophy is to maximise *experiential* learning in the field!

# What's News



## NaRLA and Landholders Secure Envirofund Grants

The Australian Government has recently announced the successful applicants for their Envirofund Round 8 2006-2007 grants.

NaRLA sponsored and worked with two Nature Refuge landholders in the design of their projects and the preparation of their applications for Envirofund Round 8 funding. Both of the NaRLA-supported grant applications were successful.

John Lucas and Christine Sayer, owners of Granitica NR at Eukey in the Granite Belt secured \$11,818 to assist with fencing to exclude stock from their Nature Refuge and an important wetland, and for the installation of an alternative stock-watering point. Ben Barton, owner of Bartopia NR in the McPherson Range near Boonah, a 'biodiversity hotspot', secured \$26,958 to help re-vegetate an area of the upper catchment of Yamahra Creek following removal of a lantana infestation.

NaRLA and the 40 Nature Refuge landholders who sought our assistance with their NatureAssist projects are looking forward hopefully to an equal success rate with the NatureAssist tenders.

## NaRLA and its members embrace the NatureAssist scheme

The EPA had a very strong response to their call for expressions of interest in tendering for NatureAssist funding support for nature conservation projects on existing and prospective Nature Refuges.

Chris Hansen, EPA Nature Refuge Co-ordinator, reports that Expressions of Interest were received from 70 existing Nature Refuge landholders, all of whom were invited to submit tenders for projects. A further 95 expressions of interest were received from other landholders interested in joining the Nature Refuge program.

Marta Hardeman, NaRLA's President, said that it is very encouraging to see the steadily growing number of Queensland landholders who recognise the benefits of committing their land to nature conservation. "Feedback received from landholders by NaRLA suggests that one important factor encouraging this growth in interest is the emerging recognition by the EPA of the need for Conservation Agreements to be flexible and tailored to take account of landholders' income generation needs in conjunction with nature conservation goals", Marta said. "However, if the Nature Refuge program

is to ever to reach its full potential, it is essential that landholders get the management guidance and other assistance necessary to support their conservation efforts. It is in the areas of management guidance and provision of service support that close co-operation and co-ordination between the EPA and NaRLA, the Nature Refuge landholders' representative body, can bring the Nature Refuge program to a whole new level of effectiveness", she said.

Marta pointed out that 40 of the 70 owners of existing Nature Refuges who submitted Expressions of Interest in NatureAssist have sought NaRLA's assistance with the organisation, implementation and management of their projects to complement and extend the benefits of the financial and extension support provided to them by the EPA, thereby extending the conservation benefits of their projects. "This is the kind of constructive and productive complementary effort between landholders and government agencies that we should all be working diligently to progress — without it, the Nature Refuge program will never be all it could be", Marta said.

## New Director General for EPA.

Mr James Purtill was replaced by Mr Terry Wall as Director-General of the EPA on 24th July. Mr Wall was promoted from his previous position as Deputy Director-General of the Policy Division and Cabinet Secretary at the Department of Premier and Cabinet. He has 20 years experience with State and Federal governments, as well as six years international experience with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Mr Purtill has been appointed to the position of Public Service Commissioner.

## Refuge for the People

Maureen Cooper, of Padaminka NR in Walkerston, continues to position her Nature Refuge as a vibrant local resource. She hosts Conservation Volunteer teams, numerous birdwatching groups, and most importantly, has made Padaminka NR an environmental resource for local schools.

On the 29th October, Padaminka will launch a children's 'Stickybeak' club. As a member of NaRLA, Maureen would be a font of information for other members wondering whether they should/could do something similar, and if so, how they could go about it.

## Gorbachev visits Thylogale Nature Refuge

Earth Dialogues Brisbane 2006 was a major international forum featuring international decision makers and Nobel Laureates in peace and other disciplines as keynote speakers, moderators and panelists. The Forum, co-chaired by Mikhail Gorbachev, current Chair of Green Cross International and former president of the Soviet Union, and Premier Peter Beattie, focused on the need for the ethical and sustainable management of natural resources and its potential for enhancing world peace. Prior to departing Australia, Mr Gorbachev and his entourage visited the Thylogale Nature Refuge at Julatten for a taste of Australian tropical rainforest.

# NaRLA joining international biodiversity research consortium

Since last June, NaRLA has been exploring with Queensland universities the establishment of a state-wide co-ordinated long-term program of collaborative research using Nature Refuges as study sites.

The very nature conservation qualities that qualified properties for acceptance as Nature Refuges makes them ideal sites to study nature conservation and biodiversity and to assess how effective the various methods being used to manage the land for nature conservation and biodiversity enhancement really are. The great diversity of ecosystems represented on Nature Refuges around Queensland makes Nature

Refuges collectively a research resource with outstanding potential to expand our knowledge and refine our management of our State's natural assets.

The current discussions on research collaboration between NaRLA and universities and other research organisations was prompted by two things: first, the obvious outstanding potential of Nature Refuges as sites for research and the development of techniques for nature conservation management on private lands; and second, the widespread interest by Nature Refuge landholders around the State in making their land available for research co-ordinated by NaRLA.

As the first concrete step towards realising the potential of NaRLA and our member landholders to make major contributions in nature conservation research, education, and management, NaRLA will be accepting an invitation to join the International Program for Planned Biodiversity Studies

(PPBio) — Australasian Consortium.

The PPBio program focuses specifically on monitoring natural biodiversity at fixed locations over time. Changes over time observed in the biodiversity on a site can be analysed in respect to concurrent changes in environmental factors or land management practices that may have been related to the changes in biodiversity. The findings of these studies can then be applied to enable more effective management of the land in the future.

PPBio biodiversity study sites are already established in Brasil and are under establishment in Australia, with sites also proposed in Nepal and Malaysia. Information gathered by the PPBio program will be progressively published on the world wide web. Data of particular interest to Nature Refuge landholders may be published on NaRLA's web page, or our web page will provide links to other pages on which the information is available.

## Workshops on Fire and Biodiversity Management

In response to strong expressions of interest from a number of our members in learning about fire management and the development and use of Fire Management Plans, NaRLA, in association with the Fire and Biodiversity Consortium at Griffith University, will be offering a series of workshops on fire and biodiversity management around Queensland in the middle of 2007.

To make these workshops as accessible for as many landholders as possible, we want to chose venues around the State that are the most convenient for the most people. To help us do this, those interested in participating should drop us a line by mid November (email, phone, fax, mail, or our Contact NaRLA form on our web page). We would be happy to have any of your neighbours who are interested participate in the workshop too — remember, their fires can become your fires!

The workshops will be highly practical in their format, and where possible, will be built into the development of a real fire management plan for the property on which each workshop is held. When you contact us, let us know if you would like to offer you Nature Refuge as a venue for a workshop, and how many other people you know who would be interested in attending.

**Keep an eye on our website Notice Board early in the New Year for details of dates and locations.**

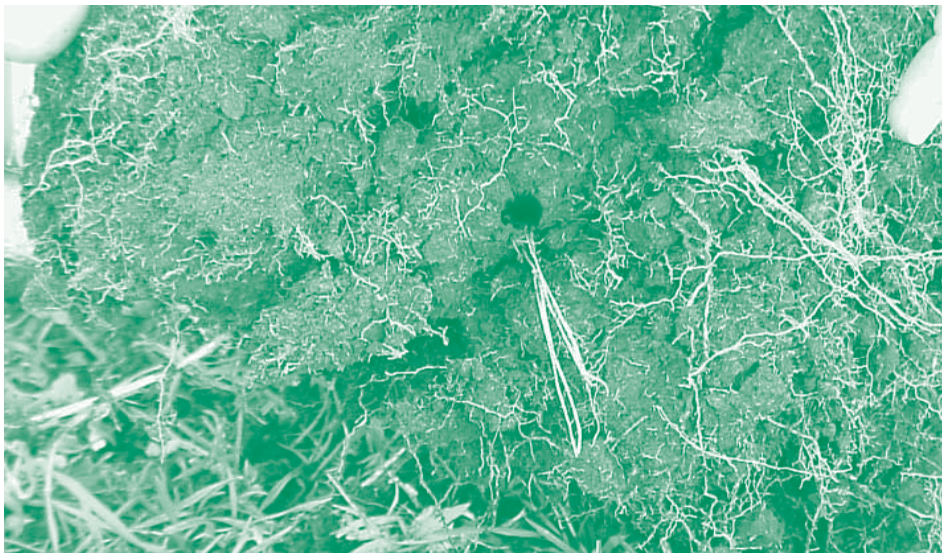
## Sharing links

NaRLA is widening our communications network, and establishing reciprocal web site links with a growing number of organisations. Weeds Australia and Birds Australia Southern Queensland (one of NaRLA's members) have now added the NaRLA web page link to their sites, and suggested other links for ours. Linking up with other groups' web pages in this way helps make us better known and opens up important channels for the exchange of information and ideas. If you would like to share a reciprocal link between your web page and NaRLA's, phone or email us or contact us through our web page. In the six months to the end of August NaRLA received 15,353 hits on our web page.

## Latest NatureAssist Information

Nature Refuge landholders who have been invited to tender for NatureAssist projects should be aware that we have been advised by the EPA's Nature Refuge / NatureAssist Co-ordinator that, unlike the usual arrangement with grants from government agencies, where a simple stand-alone agreement to the terms of the grant is signed by grantees, those Nature Refuge landholders whose NatureAssist tenders are accepted will have to have their original Nature Refuge Conservation Agreement amended to include the terms and conditions of the NatureAssist grant. He also advised that your designated local Nature Refuge Officer can explain all about this matter to you. So, we strongly urge you to contact your local Nature Refuge Officer to get written confirmation of the full administrative and legal implications for you of this Conservation Agreement amendment procedure.

**If you have any trouble getting the necessary information, please let the NaRLA office know.**



## SOIL HEALTH AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY PART 2

### IS YOUR SOIL A RENEWABLE RESOURCE?

Soil means so many things to so many people. An engineer can view it as a problem to be removed due to its potential instability. Yet, to farmers and other landholders, it is a precious resource that not only has a commercial value, but an inherent and ethical value. But is soil a sustainably renewable resource? The key issue is whether or not a soil is capable of continuously regenerating its topsoil. A healthy soil has the ability to 'grow topsoil' and, under an appropriate management system, this process can be made sustainable and the soil literally becomes younger as new soil is formed.

So, how is topsoil regenerated and how can we optimise this natural process? The answer is to learn from and work with nature. Earthworm castings left on the surface of soil are evidence of one of the processes by which soils become younger. Often, the original soil material in worm casts is ingested by the worm in the subsoil and then brought up to the surface of the soil and discharged by the worm. However, in the process of being ground up into smaller particles in the worm's gizzard, the total soil particle surface area is increased, and consequently, the minerals contained in the soil become more readily available and soluble. Organic matter ingested by earthworms is digested by bacteria in the worm's gut, which produces enzymes and releases nitrogen, creating an end product that Charles Darwin called "Vegetable Mould".

Evidence of another example of the process of 'topsoil growth' can be seen if you dig up a plant and note the quality of soil close around the main roots compared to nearby areas of soil without plants. The differences in soil structure and composition that you see are the results of interactions between the plant's roots and associated organisms in the soil. The plant's roots and the associated organisms are the 'workforce' growing the topsoil.

### HOW DOES THIS WORKFORCE DO ITS JOB?

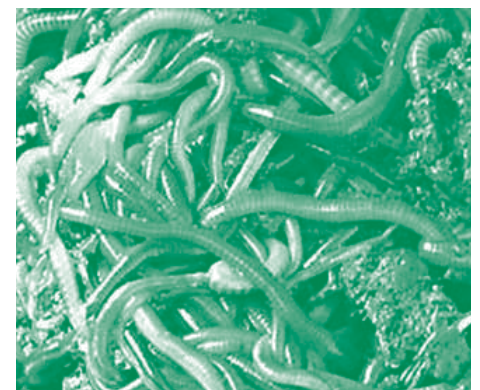
Plants manufacture carbohydrates and release them from their root systems into the soil. Soil organisms associated with the plant's roots use this source of energy provided by the plants. Some of these micro-organisms may live and die in a cycle of less than twenty seconds. In both life and death these organisms release chemicals into the soil. The chemical changes resulting from these processes cause the soil pH to change along the plant's rootlets, which in turn unlocks and makes available other, different, chemical elements. The root hairs themselves break off and are consumed by the soil microbes, which in turn produce wastes that may be toxic to some soil microbes but may be food to others. Micro-organisms are constantly eating one another and competing for exudates which the plant produces from its roots. It is almost a war zone! As this battle between the microbes continues, the root cap pushes on in its endless search for space and nutrients, and a main mature root is left.

When the mature root dies it leaves a small hole in the soil, which is called a micro-pore. Earthworms follow these old root channels down into the soil. The earthworm is nature's plough. This small root channel, after being bored out by an earthworm, becomes a macro-pore. Increased gaseous exchange can take place through the enlarged air spaces of the macro-pores and the soil can start to 'breathe' better, providing increased oxygen supplies to the soil, which aids increase in microbial populations. As the earthworm moves through the soil, it leaves the smear of shiny slime, which consists mainly of calcium pectate. The plant root systems utilise this relatively available form of calcium and their new roots go down the worm channels (old root channels) —if you break open a clod of soil, you can see them clinging to the sides of the worm channels.

So, the soil's regeneration cycle continues. The end product of this biological factory is humus (organic matter), which covers the old or original soil particles and binds them together. As the topsoil is renewed by this process, nutrients are recycled and the soil will become darker due to an increase in carbon content from the organic material, soil particle aggregation will increase, which in turn will lead to greater soil pore space, which in turn will increase water holding capacity and aeration, all of which enhances soil health and fertility.

Whether or not soil is allowed to degrade or encouraged to re-generate is a key and basic issue determining whether farming is or is not sustainable, and ultimately, whether human civilisation is able to survive. Healthy soil is sustainable and renewable when managed appropriately. In the next issue of NaRLA News, practical management strategies to develop healthier soil will be reviewed.

Gwyn Jones 2006  
gjones@healthyag.com



## CATS CLAW BIOCONTROL



Don't be fooled by the sight of the ornamental sunny yellow bell flowers up in the trees. This sturdy vine with three-clawed tendrils for easy climbing, winged seeds for easy dispersal, underground tubers and a vigorous root system has all the attributes of a formidable weed.

It is a declared class 3 pest plant in Queensland (Land Protection, Pest and Stock Management Act 2002), capable of completely smothering native vegetation, trees included.

Management is difficult, expensive and time intensive, requiring diligent follow-up of regrowth from each tuber.

The good news is Queensland scientists may have found an alternative. Scientists from Alan Fletcher Research Station, NRMW, have sought approval for the release of a leaf sucking bug that favours cats claw creeper to the plant's detriment. Of 36 plant species studied, this biocontrol agent was able to complete its lifecycle only on cats claw creeper.

Trial sites for bug release and ongoing research are currently being planned in some heavily infested areas of Queensland. For further information, contact K. Dhileepan, AFRS, k.dhileepan@qld.gov.au or Dept Environment and Heritage website.

Fiona Mayers

The space between  
a bird and a fruit is  
never an obstacle  
for the bird.

Tukaram 1605

# PROPERTY PROFILE

## AVOCET NATURE REFUGE

### — NATURE CONSERVATION AND RESEARCH

Before his death in 1996, my father developed a special affinity with a particular part of our property, "Avocet", 32 km south of Emerald in Central Queensland, and mentioned that he hoped it would never be cleared. Although I had no intention of ignoring his wish, I knew that any subsequent owner would be under no such obligation, so I investigated the possibility of some form of permanent protection. I was fortunate to meet Juliana McCosker (EPA Emerald) in 1996 and she suggested having this substantial area, 1,150 ha, converted to the status of Nature Refuge. Juliana carried out the preliminary work of fauna and flora surveys and arranged the administrative details. We worked out a perpetual conservation agreement that was acceptable to all parties and this included my right to conservatively graze cattle on the refuge. The 'Avocet' Nature Refuge was declared on June 3rd, 1999.

About this time, Janelle Lowry from Queensland Parks and Wildlife in Rockhampton, and Gary Porter (also QPWS) visited me, investigating the possibility of re-introducing the Flashjack (Bridled nail-tailed wallaby) onto private land for the first time. Until it was rediscovered in 1973, the Flashjack, *Onychogalea fraenata*, was thought to be extinct and, at the time of this proposal, there were only two populations in existence, both on National Parks in Queensland. They inspected the refuge and decided that it was an ideal habitat for the relocation of the Flashjacks from a breeding site at BHP's Gregory Mine, north of Emerald. It was considered that our Nature Refuge offered some advantages over the national parks in terms of management issues and habitat suitability. I understand that the presence of large areas of introduced Buffel grass in Taunton National Park creates problems for the survival of the Flashjack. The Avocet Nature Refuge does contain Buffel grass, but not in substantial quantities. I agreed to co-operate as I had often attempted to make it known publicly that the refuge was open to use, scientifically and recreationally, to society at large.

A considerable amount of preparation was required before our new residents could be received. After the construction of a

release pen and involvement by children from the Gindie State School in building shelters, the first release of sixteen Flashjacks took place on 15 December 2001. Resplendent in coloured ear tags and radio collars, they surveyed their pen in front of a generous gathering of visitors, radio and television media and dignitaries from the Emerald Shire Council, who sponsored the program.

There have been thirteen subsequent releases, bringing the total up to 153 animals. The severe drought of 2002-03 proved a major impediment to the project, but recent surveys suggest numbers are still encouraging and young on the ground indicate the animals endured the conditions remarkably well. On my part, I make an effort to avoid overgrazing their habitat, despite the severity of the drought. As radio collars are expensive and accidental loss is an unavoidable problem, not all animals are collared, so exact numbers are impossible to monitor.

As I write, feral animal control is taking place on the refuge and Flashjacks are being trapped and monitored. We are determined that their relocation will be a success and their future secured.

Hugo Spooner  
Avocet Nature Refuge



## AD HOC MANAGEMENT OF NATURE REFUGES

— it doesn't have to continue to be that way.

The management of private land for nature conservation is a specialised task and a responsibility of long-term and global significance. If landholders who have accepted this responsibility by joining the Nature Refuge program are to be able to manage their land accordingly, they must be provided with the necessary specialised assistance and support.

The most basic and essential tool they need to manage their land effectively is a properly designed Management Plan to enable them to set and prioritise their conservation and related objectives. Without such a plan to guide them, they can never do more than stumble around without direction hoping that something worthwhile will come out of their efforts. This is not good enough!

The *Queensland Nature Conservation Act 1992* dictates that the Minister for the Environment shall provide Nature Refuge landholders with a management plan for their Nature Refuge, unless absolved from having to do so by the subject Nature Refuge Conservation Agreement.

A sample of forty Queensland Nature Refuge landholders (approximately 20%) was recently surveyed by NaRLA. Of those surveyed, the Conservation Agreements of thirty-five stipulate that the Minister is to provide them with the management plan mandated by the Act. However, not one of those thirty-five has been provided with that management plan, despite some of their Nature Refuges being established as long ago as 1997.

A delegation of NaRLA Management Committee members is scheduled to meet with the new Director General of the EPA on 3 December to brief him on NaRLA and its operations and discuss

the Nature Refuge program and issues of interest or concern to Nature Refuge landholders. At that meeting, NaRLA will be offering our full co-operation and access to our service delivery resources to the Director General to support the Minister and the EPA and augment their resources to ensure that the major impediment to the effective management of Nature Refuges that is posed by the lack of the mandated Management Plans is removed without further delay.

NaRLA's service delivery team has the capacity to complete the outstanding Management Plans for all of the currently existing Nature Refuges by the end of 2007. If the Queensland government is prepared to allocate the necessary funding for the work from the NatureAssist budget, then by pooling the resources of the EPA and NaRLA, that goal is readily achievable. Nature Refuge landholders will then be able to plan and carry out the management of their land with confidence, and with the assurance that their efforts and resources—and public funding—can be applied in the most efficient and cost-effective manner, and not potentially wasted through *ad hoc* management!

The investment of funds from the very substantial NatureAssist pool to provide these Management Plans would be a truly prudent and productive investment, the benefits of which will reach far into the future. Allocation of NatureAssist funds to meet the long-outstanding obligation to provide the Management Plans should be in addition to, *not instead of*, funding for NatureAssist works projects for which existing Nature Refuge landholders have been invited to tender!

NaRLA looks forward to working closely with the EPA to achieve this vitally important and far-reaching step towards effective management of Queensland Nature Refuges.

**Marta Hardeman**  
President

## WHAT PUBLIC EVENTS (LOCAL SHOWS, FESTIVALS, FIELD DAYS, ETC.) ARE HELD IN YOUR DISTRICT?

NaRLA is compiling a list of local events that we could attend and/or participate in to make people aware of NaRLA, our objects and our activities, what we offer the community, and how people can participate in our activities.

We would appreciate it greatly if our members and other readers would send us details of events (agricultural shows; regional Landcare meetings; cultural, historical or musical festivals; field days; trade shows; community organisation events; etc.) in their district where NaRLA may be able to run a stall, make a presentation, conduct a question and answer session, etc. Please send us details of the name of each event, when and where it is run, and the name and phone number and/or address of someone involved in its organisation whom we can contact.

It is important that people know who NaRLA is, and what we can do for the community. We really do depend on the kind assistance of our readers to help us make contacts in their local districts, so your suggestions of events where we can get the word out will be most gratefully received.

## HOSTS/MENTORS WANTED FOR AUSTRALIAN AND OVERSEAS INTERNS SEEKING PRACTICAL NATURE CONSERVATION EXPERIENCE

Are you interested in hosting university or professional development interns, WWOOFers, and others wanting practical experience working on farms or stations or in the field with professional consultants to help them learn about nature conservation and its management in Australia? If so, call us (07-3844-0417), fax us (07-3217-2202), email us (NaRLA@NatureRefuges.com), or drop us a line on our Contact NaRLA form on our web page (www.NatureRefuges.com).

## Save time and effort and improve your nature conservation results

*If you are looking for advice or other assistance to help make your nature conservation efforts on your property more effective, then you should make NaRLA's one-stop-specialist-shop your first stop to check your options.*

Call us (07-3844-0417), fax us (07-3217-2202), email us (NaRLA@NatureRefuges.com), or drop us a line on our Contact NaRLA form on our web page (www.NatureRefuges.com).