

What can we learn from disaster communities?

It is one year since a record-smashing flood and landscape collapse event raged through the Northern Rivers. In the media frenzy of the floodiversary there is plenty of attention on trauma, frustration, government failure or upon the heroics of what must have been one of the largest most successful civilian rescue efforts in Australia's history.

Reflecting upon that year I have been moved to somehow try to accommodate the tragedy with the triumph, the loss with the growth, the beauty with the horror, and to seek to articulate what we have learned about ourselves, about disasters and about this thing we call government.

The question of what do disaster communities need is a fair one, but so too is the question of what can the rest of the country learn from disaster communities.

In the flood experience of myself and so many of my peers, mixed inextricably with loss was acceptance, with devastation was empowerment, and with grief was inspiration.

I feel as though deep in the evolutionary brain of humans, is a special capacity for natural disasters. When it is activated we get to witness some of the most inspirational qualities of humans both individually and collectively. From the courage and calm of those trapped in or on roofs, to the selfless courage of their rescuers, to the generosity of spirit of entire communities both in and around disaster, to the collective processing of trauma, we have been privileged to witness something truly remarkable.

Beneath the seemingly inexorable drudgery of civilisation, of a world dominated by disconnection, consumerism, materialism and individualism and the debilitating cult of authority, lies human potentials of immense power, beauty and sheer practical usefulness.

For at least 80% of us disaster unleashes what is great within us.

The reality is that for major disasters the local community will always be the first responders. This is true not only of rescue (the immediate life-saving) but also of the much longer and more wearying road of recovery.

Before we criticise the failure of government or emergency services in a major emergency, we should pause to acknowledge that what we are actually seeing is not the failure of government, but actually its inherent and unavoidable limits.

It is impossible for the state to have enough boats, personnel, or organising capacity to match what a self-organising community can offer up virtually in an instant. The community lives in and amongst its own disaster, and its resources of all kinds become mobilised almost instantly. From the tinny army, to the many fine people who magically appear at the drop off points to take in soggy refugees to feed and clothe them, to the emergent relief groups such as Helping Hands, Koori Mail and Resilience Lismore, and beyond that to the distributed emergent activities of the community itself, these are our most powerful and effective first responders and always will be.

Government, even emergency services have organisational models that function well enough in predictable scenarios but are caught out when the domain of chaos calls for instant responses to novel challenges. In an 'emergency', the most powerful first response is the 'emergent' one.

What we experienced with the collapse of the police, the overstretch of the SES, the dysfunction of communications infrastructure was not an aberration, it was exactly what major disaster looks and feels like, and only self-organising and emergent community response can fill that gap.

So, what is the lesson here?

The lesson is that in the first days and weeks government will spin its wheels trying to get its



by Aidan Ricketts

large hierarchical, risk-averse structures to mobilise and that the 100% best practice response of government would be to first and foremost resource the community's mobilisation as fully and freely as the bean counters and audit trail goblins can tolerate. Literally drop a cool few million onto the emergent structures and stop the control fantasy that the community may not spend it as wisely as a room full of bureaucrats (on big wages) might spend it three months down the line.

Someone was already paying for the tinny fuel, the clothes and the sandwiches, just support them!

Secondly, and I think Lismore did this well, respect the community response, don't inhibit it, don't try to corral it, and don't engage in the authoritarian fantasy that the community will descend into mob chaos without the state. The truth is the chaos is the terrain already and the spontaneity of the community is its best antidote. Authority at that point would be clunky and dysfunctional.

This brings me to lesson three. Leave your safety mentality at the kerb. This is a disaster in case you hadn't noticed. Faced with the potential for massive loss of life, each rescuer did what they had to do; faced with a mountain of mud every crew did what they had to do and took all of the necessary risks.

The Lismore free state, a place in time where the veneer of society was stripped away, where money was

irrelevant and where goodwill was currency lasted for many weeks. One of the most important challenges for government is how to gradually and respectfully re-establish itself into that space.

It's not that we don't need government its just that we need them to be useful, not anxious, inflexible and authoritarian.

The other great lesson is about that other great governance system of our time, the insurance cartels. Seriously, in my observations those without flood insurance were better able to retain control of their own disaster journey, and their own recovery than many with insurance. I have heard so many harrowing stories of gangs of 'make safe' goons sent by insurance companies bullying vulnerable people and stripping homes of the wear-with-all for recovery. Tearing out wooden lining boards, plumbing and even floors, then leaving. Having completely displaced people from their homes, the insurance companies sometimes decided, you didn't have flood insurance anyway, or if you did, we won't get on to a rebuild for more than year. Worse, we are now hearing of a refusal to replace the destroyed and resilient timber walls with more timber and a truly insane insistence on replacing wood with gyprock.

I am not saying mistakes were not made by well-wishing people partaking in recovery, we know the orgy of disposal became irrational and harmful at times but it's nothing on the scale of the impact of the make safe goons.

So, what of the government's role in long term recovery, because this is where the slow-moving wheels of bureaucracy at least have some purchase (so to speak). For my part the immediate back home grants were very useful. \$20k was a much-needed help to residents, although there was some discrimination against renters. But the grand promises of buy backs were probably made prematurely. It looked good as a show of political support but it

also had the effect of immobilising people from attending to their own recovery. Like a cruel donkey and carrot game.

I have noticed that those who have fared best were those who were able (and not everyone was) to move back into their homes, camp on their verandas with a basic camping kit and slowly make their surroundings more comfortable.

There is nothing worse than being on hold and having not enough information to make choices, and sadly this has been the collective impact of the NRRRC processes for many people. I understand why it takes so long to undertake something as huge as a buy back scheme but it needs to have been more considerate of people's immediate needs along the way.

Our disaster community has done an incredible job of both rescue and recovery. The flood and its mud were one set of challenges and traumas but the impacts of insurance companies and government processes has been a source of much secondary trauma. There are so many lessons to be learnt in that space, and hopefully government may try to learn, I'm not as optimistic about the insurance industry.

As a disaster community we can be rightly proud of ourselves, we are an inspiration to many, and as the escalating chaos of climate change engulfs Australia and the world, our learnings and our collective and individual growth and wisdom will be a resource for survival for many communities in the future.

We don't need pity, and we don't need managing. What we need is support for our own processes, resourcing and the respect from government, media and society at large, that we are not just victims we are pioneers of skill set that other communities will sadly increasingly need in the future.

All the best to our great community a year on from a truly disastrous emergency, thanks for emerging.

Tweed flood mitigation projects

Tweed mayor Chris Cherry has welcomed an announcement by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to fund almost \$6 million in flood mitigation projects in the Tweed.

The funding announcement was made last week by Federal Minister for Emergency Management Murray Watt as part of a \$150 million commitment by the Australian Government to improve the disaster resilience of the Northern Rivers region.

The funding announcement coincided with the release of two CSIRO reports into the 2022 flood in the Northern Rivers.

The Tweed projects were announced as part of the first phase of the Northern Rivers Resilience Initiative which will see 16 projects recommended

by the CSIRO funded to the tune of \$50 million, with the bulk of the funding to go to Lismore.

Tweed projects given the green light include:

- A new pump system within the East Murwillumbah Levee (south of George Street) to assist with drainage – \$1,461,114;
 - New low flow pump at Lavender Creek and Murwillumbah CBD – \$969,106;
 - Earthworks across Lot 4 on Quarry Road to preserve the South Murwillumbah Condong flowpath – \$942,480; and
 - Additional Wharf Street, Murwillumbah pump capacity – \$2,355,065.
- Funding will also be shared between the seven Local Government Areas (LGAs) of the Northern Rivers,

including the Tweed, on several regional-wide programs, including:

- Regional program to increase community flood risk awareness, through information campaigns and flood warning signs – \$3 million;
 - Regional program to complete flood level surveys for buildings across all LGAs to input into flood risk assessments – \$800,000; and
 - Regional assessment of evacuation routes, their capacity and options for infrastructure upgrades across all LGAs – \$1.2 million.
- Chris Cherry welcomed the commitment of funding for some of the projects put forward to the CSIRO by Council's flood management team.

"We welcome this funding and are really pleased to see the Federal and NSW Governments change their focus on recovery to one of flood mitigation," Cr Cherry said.

"We look forward to working with both tiers of government to deliver these projects as part of the first tranche of funding, as well as future projects as part of the greater \$150 million package. "It is really critical for the resilience of our community moving forward that we are focused on what we can do to prevent such devastation from happening again. While we can't do much to control the weather, we can put measures in place to reduce risk to both the community and infrastructure."

Council's director of engineering David Oxenham



Murwillumbah CBD levee at Wharf Street just after 5pm on 28th February 2022.

said the additional funding was most welcome.

The record deluge of 28th February and 1st March caused significant damage in the Tweed, particularly to the road network, with an estimated damages bill of more than \$110 million to Council infrastructure alone.

Since the flood, Council has introduced several new flood mitigation systems, including the launch of live flood monitoring cameras,

which allow residents to access real-time footage of key vantage points across the Tweed. The Burringbar, Mooball and Crabbes Creek Flash Flood Alert system, developed together with the local community and the SES, also provides an early alert to residents along these creek systems.

To find out more about Council's Flood Recovery works, visit: tweed.nsw.gov.au/flood-recovery-update



Luke O'Driscoll surveys his Broadwater home – the flood level reached the bottom of the windows of the house which had been raised after the 2017 flood

A year on, volunteer tradies are travelling to Lismore to restore essential plumbing and bathrooms for homes of flood survivors.

After the record flooding events, many residents are still unable to fully move back into their homes due to lack of essential plumbing, including running water.

Resilient Lismore is partnering with the Reece Foundation to bring volunteer tradies to the community to restore essential plumbing in the homes of some of the most vulnerable members of the community.

The project is part of a broader Resilient Lismore initiative, Two Rooms & a Bathroom, which leverages donations and works with volunteers to rebuild homes of flood-affected residents.

Community recovery organisation Resilient Lismore, with the help of volunteers and supporters, has led the charge to get flood-affected

residents back into their homes. A year on from the flooding events that decimated the community, many residents are still displaced and either living in temporary accommodation or in homes without access to basic plumbing, like clean running water, showers, or toilets.

Elly Bird, Resilient Lismore executive director said: "If it wasn't for the willingness of volunteers and charitable partners, we wouldn't have made a dent in getting these people back into their homes, but more needs to be done to support our community."

"With a shortage of financial support, skilled tradespeople and materials, many households have faced huge barriers to restoring healthy and habitable homes. Our volunteers have already started installing walls for people living in shells of homes – part of the successful and ongoing 'Two Rooms Project'."

Two rooms and a bathroom

Resilient Lismore has deployed more than 13,800 volunteers to more than 3,600 community rebuild jobs and has delivered 'Two Rooms' to 72 homes so far. Thousands of homes are still so significantly water-damaged that they should not be lived in. However, many people have little choice but to remain in these homes despite the removal of walls, bathrooms, and kitchens for safety reasons.

"Through our community outreach work, we heard that a lot of people were living without things like toilets, running water and showers – so with the support of the Reece Foundation, we have rebranded the project to 'Two Rooms & a Bathroom'," Bird said.

Resilient Lismore and the Reece Foundation have a shared objective to provide access to essential plumbing for those who are displaced or vulnerable, to ensure they can live in their homes safely and with dignity.

Together, Resilient Lismore and Reece Foundation have co-designed the project to ensure they can deliver the restoration of essential plumbing services for 37 households and small businesses across the Northern Rivers. On the eve of the one-year anniversary, a group of 11 volunteer tradies from across Australia travelled to Lismore to restore kitchens, bathrooms and laundries for the most vulnerable members of the community and

will be working there over the next three weeks. Additionally, Reece has donated all the plumbing products so the restoration work will be completed at no cost to residents.

Volunteer plumber Carl Bushby was among the group of tradies who came to Lismore in November to scope the essential plumbing works required and decided to return to help finish the restoration work over the next couple of weeks.

He said, "Stepping away from the day-to-day of my business and coming back to finish what we started in Lismore was a no-brainer for me. This group of people is incredible. They've welcomed us back with open arms – it's been an honour to get on the tools to ensure they can feel safe, secure and warm in their homes again."

Cr Bird concluded, "While more still needs to be done for this

community, this locally led project is a significant moment in our community recovery journey."

Resilient Lismore has prioritised people who cannot afford to do this work themselves, however Resilient Lismore and the Reece Foundation will continue to work together to identify further support for community members who still need access to essential plumbing.

If Australians want to support the on-going Two Rooms & a Bathroom project, they can:

- Make a tax deductible donation at: www.floodhelpnr.com.au
- Tradies can register their interest to volunteer at: www.reecefoundation.charity/get-involved/volunteer
- Anyone can buy Reece Foundation merchandise at: reecefoundation.charity – all profits from sales will support future project works.



Terania catchment – seeking your flood observations

by Annie Kia

The Channon Resilience Inc. has a flood safety project for the Terania sub-catchment: we're bedding down a system whereby upstream sentinels provide rain intensity data during rain events.

Some have on-line electronic weather stations. If these should fail, we rely on admirable and committed sentinels to make two-hourly observations to give us the precipitation rate (rain intensity).

We are improving as we go, and during the October event were able to provide collated rain intensity data to the SES. We also provided this information to downstream members of our CB radio network. If the internet goes down we'll need to provide this information via radio. Our Tech Development team is working on a way to show real-time rain and creek levels on our own website, but that's a work in progress.

Our partnership with the ANU Institute of Climate, Energy and Disaster Solutions has been most helpful. Dr Barry Croke is developing a hydrological model for the Terania catchment, and their team is applying for a grant which, if successful, will enable us to get the creek monitoring and communication gear we need to get to the next stage.

How to give us your Terania catchment flood observations

First, check out the catchment map. The Terania sub-catchment



Creekflat level at a gate, taken close to the 2017 flood peak. Photo: A Kia

includes Tuntable, Branch and Rocky Creeks, and Terania Creek down to the junction with Goolmangar Creek. We seek community observations of where floods reached in 2017 and 2022. In particular if you can point to where you think the flood peak came to. In addition, we're interested in photos that show flood extent or height against permanent structures such as poles, fences, big rocks or trees.

The on-line survey can be found at: <https://thechannonhub.org/flood-survey> If you'd prefer to do a paper version email: SafeTerania@gmail.com or phone 0490-089-676. The survey closes on 22nd March.

Search your phone images

If you find you have a useful photo for flood benchmarking, have a look at the image information to find

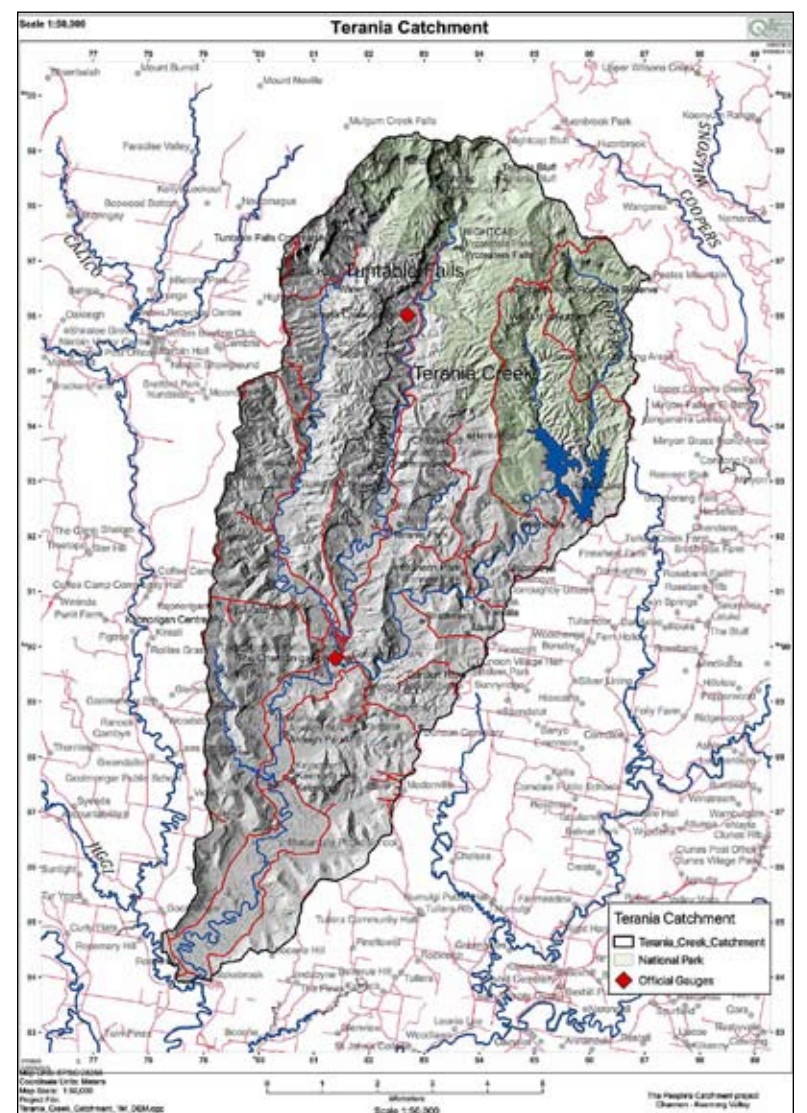
the date and time it was taken (if you don't know how to do this, ask someone who has a similar phone). Make a copy of good photos for safekeeping.

Following the survey, we will visit some locations where residents can point to flood extent so we can get GPS coordinates. This will help build our understanding of how rain translates to flood-on-landscape.

We'll also show interested people how to add text to images that gives year, date, time and location (when sharing images on social media it's important that people know what they're looking at).

After the survey we'll host a community meeting to share what has been learnt, and how citizen flood intelligence might help decision-making.

The Channon Resilience Inc would like to thank Northern



Map showing the Terania sub-catchment. Courtesy Greg Hall

Rivers Community Foundation for the grant that makes this flood observation project possible. We

know there's a treasure trove of community flood knowledge and we can't wait to gather it.

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Lucy Car - artist of the month



by Tonia Haynes

Lucy Car is a Lismore local who delights in bright, bold colours in acrylic paint to bring a smile on your face and warm your heart. Painting flora and still life pieces, mostly of Australian native plants, she adds a touch of quirkiness that brings a sense of fun.

Living on her property with her five children and husband, they have a large garden with ducks, dogs, fruit and veges and are slowly replanting the rest with rainforest trees. She has had various solo and group art shows, beginning in



Wagga Wagga and most recently at the Cassino Art Gallery in Casino. She also sells her work on-line. Seeing Lucy's art in reality brings home to the viewer the extent of her passion and joy for painting and we are honoured to show her pieces at the Nimbin Artists Gallery.

Portrait exhibition acknowledges flood rescuers

In the weeks after the February 28 flood in 2022, Jeanti St Clair was asked by more than a few people what she was planning to do to document what had happened. Earlier in 2021, she had presented her audio walks documenting the 2017 Lismore flood; so "time for another flood story, Jeanti," a friend had said. In April 2022, Jeanti, together with Lismore photographer Raimond de Weerd began working on the Rescue Project, reaching out to the community for names of rescuers. Their current exhibition represents 10 months of gathering, meeting, and talking to and photographing people involved in the tremendous effort by civilian rescuers during the February 28 flood.

Jeanti recorded interviews with rescuers and Raimond photographed them, capturing an essence of the emotion contained in the story. Most of the project's stories and portraits focus on the epicentre of the flood in Lismore. But Jeanti and Raimond also reached out to rescuers further downstream in Woodburn, Evans Head, Broadwater and Bungawalbin. The project acknowledges the significant effort of the uniformed rescuers – the SES and NSW Police – and the expertise and experience they brought to the effort on the day. But without the civilian effort, the story of the February 2022 flood would be very different. The project spoke with 41 people involved in water rescues or in opening their homes as places of refuge, as well as a handful of people who were rescued. This collection represents a fraction of the overall civilian effort and is a starting point of the process of filling in the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. We see perspectives on how the built environment made rescues more difficult, but also ideas on how to make future rescue efforts safer for all involved. We see the impact on the rescuers' mental health and well-being.



Raimond de Weerd and Jeanti St Clair

The exhibition includes six photographs by Elise Derwin who was on the ground and in the water on February 28. Her powerful images help contextualise the gargantuan size of the flood. The 'Love for Lismore Heart' banner, caringly crafted by Rebecca Ryan, represents the immense amount of support given to and received by the Lismore community. The honour roll of rescuers is based on an evolving list compiled by Dannielle Pickford and Sarah Moran. They have nominated each rescuer for an Australian bravery medal. The propeller in the exhibition belongs to Aidan Ricketts and was destroyed during his rescue efforts. The boat belongs to Jan Fauske. It is important to acknowledge that official records show that six lives were tragically lost during the February and March floods in the Northern Rivers. On this difficult first anniversary, Jeanti and Raimond extend all their deepest condolences. Two of the rescue stories include discussion about two people who died in the flood. These stories are contained in booklets attached to the wall, rather than in the story panel. The booklets have a trigger warning noted on their cover.

And while this entire exhibition comes with a trigger warning – as it includes discussion of flooding, people and animals in jeopardy and death – the stories are written in such a way that readers can opt out of the story at any point. Mental health and well-being information and/or volunteers are available during gallery opening hours. There is space to sit and reflect, and an opportunity for visitors to write a note about whatever comes to mind and drop it into the tinny. Over the course of the exhibition, these notes will be pinned to the Heart banner. The knowledge contained in these stories is valuable information, not only for our community but also for policy makers. We can gain insight into what it takes to rescue a community during an unprecedented flooding event. And there is much for us to learn. Jeanti St Clair and Raimond de Weerd plan to tour this exhibition and produce a book as a permanent record of the civilian rescue effort. You are encouraged to add your name to the Rescue Project's email list at the gallery reception desk if you would like to stay informed. Serpentine Gallery is at 104 Conway Street, Lismore, NSW, 2480; 10am-4pm Monday – Friday; 10am-2pm Saturday. gallery@serpentinearts.org

Coffee and a little something else



Maggie Parkhill

by Ruth Tsimbinis

Connecting through the arts is one of the aims of Littlecreek Studio, offering a place to use clay as a creative medium to enhance and foster emotional and mental wellbeing whilst embracing the philosophy of ‘Wabi sabi,’ a world view centered on the acceptance of transience and imperfection.

Located in Mallanganee, the Littlecreek Studio was established by teacher and mentor Mic Eales. After completing his PhD in Visual Arts, Mic decided to give something back to the community as a practical way to use skills learned from working as a production potter alongside his PhD work within the mental health sector.

Along with his wife Alison and daughter Elise, Littlecreek Studio opened its doors for a Friday workshop to a group of keen people ranging in age from 14 to 70, who travel an hour or more from their rural environments to connect as a group.



Erin Lowson

Mic says, “Our ‘clay play’ days begin with coffee and a little something sweet, providing a catalyst to share stories, laugh, and above all an opportunity to express support for one another.

“The sense of connectedness and belonging continues down in the studio where individuals are encouraged to express and communicate thoughts, feelings and emotions through playing with clay”.

‘Coffee and a Little Something Else’ is an exhibition of ceramic works reflecting the diversity of this group. It is a mix of styles and abilities that reflect the joy and pride in the making and holding of a ‘something’ that not so long ago had simply been a lump of wet clay,’ he says.

It is often difficult for people wishing to work in clay to access equipment and kilns, so through Littlecreek Studios people have been able to come together to experiment and learn a variety of



Mic Eales

ceramic skills and techniques from slip casting, paper clay, terracotta, earthenware, midfire, stoneware, raku, naked raku, obvara, sawdust, pit and saggar firing.

There are those who desire to hand-build, and others for whom the wheel holds much fascination. Some have been attending class for several years whilst others have been coming for only a short time.

Abilities within the group are varied. Each comes with their own ideas and aesthetic. All come with the interest to learn and share and be part of a bigger healing picture. The artworks created for this exhibition reflect the diversity of the group.

‘Coffee and a Little Something Else’ runs from Thursday 9th March to Sunday 9th April at the Roxy Gallery, Kyogle, with an Official Opening taking place on Saturday 11th March, from 1pm to 3pm, providing a great opportunity to meet up with the exhibitors and discuss works on show.

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Current exhibitions at BKH Gallery



‘We’re in This Together’ by Bev Leggett-Simmons, Table Urn and Knight Light by Bob Bishell, ‘Ole Swampy’ by Neil Plim

Bob’s Wood Works: The Solo Space. After leaving city life to work in East Arnhem Land, Bob found the time, resources and environment to cultivate a passion for bespoke items of interest.

During the 15 years he spent in the Top End honing his craft, he had the privilege of passing on most of his work to not-for-profit fund-raising events and auctions; the proceeds going towards community projects, enhancing school facilities and supporting youth in the work force.

His skills and imagination have allowed him to pursue his artistic ideals using repurposed and ecologically sustainable timbers to produce unique furniture and functional items for the home.

Eventually relocating to Nimbin in 2015 he has continued his creative path, and regularly exhibits pieces at Blue

Knob Hall Gallery and locally.

Colour & Form: These artworks have risen to the expectations of the theme and the walls are imbued with colour, sculpture and a variety of artworks that represent the human body, animals and landscapes. Bev Leggett-Simmons’ work incorporates a different view of landscape with vibrant colours and handmade/domestic objects placed in the foreground that also has a message of inclusion.

The artists who contribute to the exhibitions at the gallery always surprise with their imaginative interpretations of the themes and this one is no different. Both these exhibitions will be open until Saturday 1st April.

A Hans Heysen framed print, ‘After Morning Mist’ 1915, has been donated by friends of the Gallery as a fundraiser. Tickets (or a donation) can be purchased

at the Gallery.

Blue Knob Cafe: Sunday morning music has started at Blue Knob Cafe on a monthly basis. For information about dates and who is playing check our Facebook page. With a covered cafe veranda looking out to the beautiful Blue Knob, it’s worth a visit and enjoying the ambience of this volunteer run Gallery, Cafe and Ceramic Studio.

Backyarders at Blue Knob: the ‘Back Yarders at Blue Knob’ tables are continuing to add that extra bit of local interest on a Saturday morning at Blue Knob. We’re at the hall from 9am to 12.30pm with local produce and crafts.

For more information or enquiries on what’s happening at Blue Knob, email: bkhgallery@harbourisp.net.au or phone 02 6689-7449, web: www.blueknobgallery.com or go to Blue Knob Gallery, Cafe & Ceramic Studio FaceBook page.

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Nimbin Garden Club notes



by John Storey

Nimbin has its own unique arboretum. It is situated in High Street next to the Teretre Cabins.

The first plantings of native trees, predominately rainforest species, on what was mostly pasture land, were begun in the early seventies and the project that culminated in the planting of about 850 species continued into the eighties.

The man with the vision, dedication and energy to bring this about was Barry Walker. Unfortunately there is no documented history of this project, but what we do know is that Barry owned the local sawmill and that he also created what may have been Nimbin's first plantation of flooded gums up on Mt Nardi, where the Nimbin Sawmill used to be.

The February Garden Club meeting was held at the arboretum, and the turnout of around 50 people was extraordinary, reflecting the interest in the community inspired by this wonderful legacy left by Barry.

There are just two extant documents for the arboretum: a comprehensive plant species list and a map hand-drawn by Barry showing the layout and naming of trails. Many of the trees and shrubs

are identified by stamped aluminium plaques set on short substantial hardwood posts showing the species name and date of planting.

We followed the recently cleared, lightly used but readily identifiable trails through a beautiful forest that could easily be mistaken for a natural remnant. This landscape has the gentle stillness and calming ambience that pristine rainforests generally do, for which we can thank Gerard the current owner, who has spared no expense to have weeds and invasive tree species, predominantly Camphor Laurel, removed.

Local arborist Bill Cox has done an excellent job removing the unwanted trees, and the caretaker Sol has obviously worked hard, clearing and weeding and cutting steps into the soil on the steeper sections.

The next Nimbin Garden Club meeting will be held on Saturday 18th March, 2-4pm at Nana and Hendrik's place, 694 Stony Chute Road.

Carpooling where possible would be advisable, as there is limited parking. A nearby paddock can be used for parking, provided the gates are sure to be closed after use.

For anyone new to the area, it's a great way to meet people, and guests are always welcome. Please bring a cup, a chair and a plate to share.

Gorgeous sunny day for walk at Goanna Headland



by Peter Moyle
Nimbin Bushwalkers Club

The Wet yet to start, so a couple of walks to start the year. One of our favourites saw us off to Evans Head. 14 walkers had a gorgeous sunny day bordering on hot but a bit of breeze to keep things comfortable. This is regularly our first walk of the new year, and we never tire of revisiting.

From the carpark at Chinamans Beach you have two walks, one to the north into the Dirrawong Reserve Headland and second to the south to Goanna Headland. Lovely heathland country inland before coastal headland walking and then

beach. Easy access and information at the carpark, ideal for a few hours' enjoyment.

We lunched between walks and then a cooling swim before a relaxing chat and after-walk refreshments. As I write this in the last 10 hours Brunswick Heads has had almost 160mm or 6.5 inches of rain.

The walks scheduled below are suitable during very wet weather. Goonengerry, being on top of the ridge, drains well and is not too muddy with its creeks and waterfalls always a good walk in the wet. Ballina being a coastal walk with boardwalks, beach and formed trails also pleasant this time of year. Visitors and new members are always welcome.

Walks programme

Sunday 26th March – Goonengerry National Park

Leader: Peter Spearritt 0421 055 292
Grade: 3-4. You must register with Peter as numbers are limited. 10km approximately four hours. There are some off track sections that may be slippery. Good walking shoes/boots needed. We will be walking into an area with some nice waterfalls, hopefully a bit of water. This is a great walk even in the wet as it is on top of the ridge so not boggy.
Meet: 9am at the Goonengerry NP at the end of Mill Road. Bring the usual including hat, water, and lunch.

Friday 7th April – A Good Friday walk, Ballina to Lennox Headland

Leader: Megan Myers 0415 063 302
Grade: 3-4. This year something different, we will be walking through some beautifully restored coastal rainforest before heading up the coast to the Lennox Headland and returning. There are some drop-offs at headlands and some slippery rocks to walk over. A 12km walk.
Bring: the usual, lunch, water, good footwear, and a hat. Ring Megan to register your interest and arrange meeting point at 8.45 am. This is Good Friday, so fish and chips at the Co-op afterwards.

Gardens, a source of weeds

Weed Words
by Triny Roe

Koyaanisqatsi, a Hopi word meaning life out of balance, can apply to areas overrun by weeds. Biomass does not equal biodiversity.

Monocultures do not provide the range of habitat and food resources that wildlife need to survive all year round. If everything flowers and fruits at the same time, there is a short term feast for a few and a long term environmental problem.

Native bush is a diverse and complex ecosystem with a huge variety of plants, but that can change with the introduction of a pest plant species. It will start with just one or two and after a couple of years there might be a dozen or more.

Then, turn your back, it seems like only for a moment, and there are hundreds and the landscape is impacted. It's an exponential growth pattern ending with a population explosion. Suddenly they are everywhere.

Creepers like cat's claw, *Dolichandra unguis-cati*, madeira, *Anredera cordifolia*, and even lantana, *Lantana camara*, to name just a few, can climb trees, smother and kill them. They can also occupy the ground layer of vegetation and dominate, excluding and killing native species.



Over 2700 plants are listed as invasive in Australia. Twenty more make the list every year. Unfortunately, while a few of these are restricted, many of them are not subject to strict enough control and are still available in the nursery industry and promoted on gardening shows.

The Invasive Species Council bemoans the lack of regulation that means many of these problematic plants continue to be propagated and spread further afield. *Duranta*, *Duranta repens* aka *D. erecta*, available in nurseries, is listed in the top 50 environmental weeds in Northern NSW. In SE Qld it's in the top 100. The orange fruit is a favourite of birds who carry seed to nearby bush or creek bank where it germinates.

Many love jacarandas, *Jacaranda mimosifolia*, with their glorious mauve display in Spring. People pot up seedlings to give to friends. Jacaranda is also considered

a sub-tropical environmental weed.

It has naturalised in Hawaii, in parts of Africa and Australia but there are no restrictions here on its propagation or trade. Banned in South Africa due to its invasive capacity, in Australia, festivals in Grafton, Goodna and Goombungee celebrate this prolific pretty purple tree.

Many of the weeds, plants that run amok and transform ecosystems, have come from gardens. Since the First Fleet, a huge range of non-native plants has been brought to Australia and distributed far and wide.

Some of these exotic species have become problematic. They came as ornamentals but liked it here so much, they prospered, often to the detriment of native species or agricultural operations. Arriving without any pathogens to predate and keep the population in balance some of these introduced plants have come

to dominate landscapes.

"It's all green, let it grow", "Nature finds its way" is not applicable. Make educated choices. Don't pot up environmental weeds and distribute them. Camphor laurel, once planted widely in school yards and public places still predominates on creek banks and roadsides in the northern rivers, or on old farm land. It will keep spreading unless appropriately managed.

Some problematic pest plants are already widespread and here to stay. The high level of infestation means total eradication may not be possible so containment, i.e. don't let them spread, is the management option. For the large leafed *Miconia*, *Miconia spp.* eradication is considered possible as there are only a few, so far. Birds eat the fruit and spread the long-lived seed, so keep an eye out. Act early to prevent it naturalising in the Northern Rivers.

Happy weeding.

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Loonacy

So many pressing issues; the recognition of the Indigenous people in our nation's foundation document; the protection of our dwindling species diversity and the great work of the protestors at Doubleduke Forest; the curse of poker machine gambling and the role of its champions in the up-coming state election; the beginning of the big property buy back and the blind disregard for the people and property in the greatest risk, i.e. the Lismore CBD; the fact that the recently released CSIRO flood mitigation report doesn't actually cover any of the serious mitigations works they intend to do – that's not out till mid 2023 (keep waiting); the incomprehensible size of the inequities that allows Gena Reinhardt to earn \$37,009,726 per day and pay no tax while you, my earnest tax payer, won't earn that much in ten working lives; the collapse of productive Australia and the increasing skills poverty of a country hell bent of free trading with nations that have no wage award system.

But I'm tired... I'd like to



Revenge of the Loon
by Laurie Axtens

reveal how we are going to hell in a handbag but every time I peer timidly out of the handbag the flames singe my beard.

There is a way forward; we will find it, it won't be fair or equitable (that's clear) but it could still be kind and loving for those who share that sort of thing. Take it easy on each other, things are set to get a whole lot more challenging in the near future, and apportioning blame won't help us get through it.

A moment

by S Sorrensen

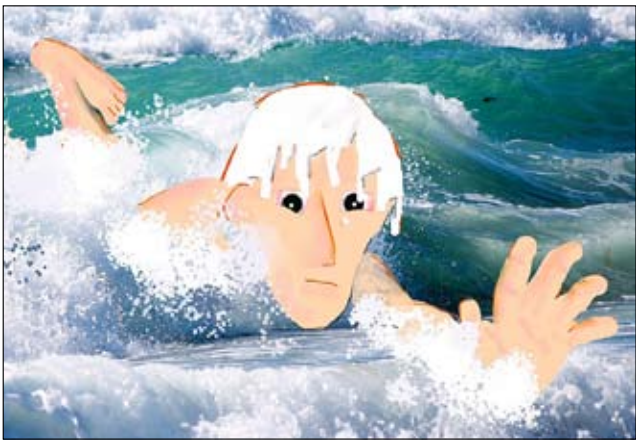
There are more stars in the universe than grains of sand on the beach.

That's what they say, "they" being scientists and people who know such stuff. I'm pretty sure no-one has actually counted the sand grains on a beach. Nor have scientists counted all the stars in the universe because – despite comparisons with my Forester, or even my mate's Commodore – the speed of light is pretty slow.

It takes a long time for the light from distant galaxies to reach our telescopes. Hell, it takes about 25,000 years for light to travel from our nearest galaxy (Canis Major Dwarf Galaxy) to us.

And there are billions more galaxies far far away, each with billions of stars and billions of planets, and which are all accelerating away from us. We'll never count them, because we'll never see them.

I wriggle my feet into the sand of Pooningbah, moving stars with my toes. Pooningbah. I like that word. "Pooningbah", I say loudly into the southerly. A woman lying belly-down on her towel, reading a phone,



looks up at me and pulls her bikini strap back up to her shoulder, before continuing her melanoma gestation.

This beach is better known as Fingal Beach, but I refer to it as Pooningbah, as generations of humans around here have for thousands of years.

My head is filled with big numbers. Sand, stars, people.

Since Homo sapiens evolved around 200,000 years ago, over 100 billion of them have died. My life is a grain of sand. So is yours. In the immensity of the universe we are tiny. How can our lives matter?

I pull off my shirt, pull down my pants, straighten my swimmers, suck in my stomach, and walk past the baking woman towards the ocean. "Pooningbah," I say as

I pass her.

If our lives don't matter, why am I sad? Why has grief hung about me like a dark shawl since you left us? You're gone. Forever. Just like that. One day there, next day, not. But the galaxies still spin. My head is spinning too.

I step into the ocean. It's chilly. Good. That's why I'm here. The chill stops the spinning thoughts and reality grabs me in a cold grip around my ankles. Eastward is the horizon, as flat as a politician's speech, except for the ugly silhouette of a container ship carrying coal from Newcastle to wherever.

You're gone.

I dive under a wave. The water tastes like tears.

I'm deeper now, where the waves are forming. A trillion

elemental molecules and a billion living cells gang up to make a wave. I turn back towards Pooningbah and stroke hard to catch it. It picks me up, effortlessly, wraps me in its fizzy tentacles, tips me over its lip and carries me towards the shore, in this, its brief life.

Oh, it feels great. It doesn't mean anything, of course, but it just feels great. This is why I'm here.

A thought returns as the sand massages my stomach: Our lives do matter. I know this. I always knew this. But why do we matter?

I get to my feet. Okay Immeasurably Large and Complex Universe, I say, respectfully, what makes our short lives on a tiny planet in a medium-sized solar system in a galaxy like billions of others matter?

Love.

Love makes us significant. It's magic. From nothing it created a universe. It gives massive galaxies and microscopic organisms the same attention to detail. It takes a life and makes a unique story. It makes death sad and birth a joy. Love makes you live.

Love is the why.

"Pooningbah," I say to the burning woman. She looks up, and smiles.

Who is responsible for the environment?

by George Pick

We live in the Anthropocene era, one where humankind has altered the Earth irrevocably, on a level with the great geological changes of the past like that of previous Ice Age transition. Except this "rupture" has occurred over a much shorter period; the so-called 'Great Acceleration' has taken place since the end of WW2.

We humans are most adept at avoiding responsibility. Scientific fixes like squirting sulphate aerosols into the upper atmosphere to limit solar radiation, hence cooling the Earth, is but one example of sidestepping the urgent need to bring down greenhouse gas emissions. This approach is in stark contrast to what really needs to be done: slashing the asset values of the big corporations, convincing consumers to consume less, imposing heavy taxes on petrol, coal and gas.

The 18th century philosopher Kant offered the supreme insight that for an enlightened human, freedom should be exercised within the constraints of self-imposed moral

law in our dealings with one another. As we enter the Anthropocene, author Clive Hamilton (pictured) in his book *Defiant Earth* argues freedom now must be understood in its relationship with the Earth: "I am not calling for a different type of ethics, I am calling for a different kind of orientation to the Earth – one in which we understand deeply our extraordinary power and unique responsibility."

It wasn't inevitable that we would slide into recklessness where greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise uncontrollably. At each stage of industrialisation there have been calls for restraint. More recently, warnings from the Club of Rome about the dangers of unlimited economic growth in the 70s; Rachel Carlson on her expose of the dangers of the widespread usage of DDT in her book *Silent Spring* in the 60s. James Lovelock with his Gaia hypothesis at this time was an attempt to see the interconnectedness within the Earth System and the need to treat this 'living entity' with care and caution.

And of course there have been countless climate activists protesting

over decades. We have seen few genuine wins though. The 2015 Paris Climate Agreements was a start. However, its implementation has proved difficult as evidenced by the COP meetings that show a real unwillingness to take the threat seriously. At every step of the way, opposition by governments and corporations to curb carbon emissions has been relentless in the name of 'not impeding economic growth'.

Social democratic governments from the 50s to 70s were more prepared to intervene in areas of public concern, yet were in the main voted out by neoliberal individualistically-inclined parties by the late 70s. The utilitarian celebration of self-interest left responsibility to look after itself. Carbon emissions were treated as an 'externality', deemed not relevant to the current economic model. In the words of the 2006 Stern Review: "Climate change is the greatest market failure the world has ever known."

How did humankind become so environmentally unconscious? Is it because we have been brainwashed



into believing that technology has primacy over Nature? That the human enterprise via technology and the capitalist economic system trumps Nature's needs at all times?

This paradigm shift has gradually descended on humankind since the start of the scientific revolution in the 1500s. Accelerating slowly at first with the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the early 1800s, then picking up speed until we find for the past five decades or so that we have turbocharged our modern civilisation into the great disconnect from Nature.

We have become acclimatised to this notion. The rights of Nature – flora and fauna –

have become secondary. Nation states, government authorities, corporations, individuals all suffer from this mostly unconscious belief.

Author Clive Hamilton argues that in the Anthropocene we have few ethical resources to call on in order to redress this imbalance. Some of the great religions are too tied to the view that nature ought to be freely exploited by man without due regard to its stewardship. He states that this leaves us only with human self-preservation, which, unless the threat is immediate, is far too weak a motivator.

Our industrial, technological society has been in a tug-of-war with Earth, and the Earth System is now reacting in an angry, even vengeful way. We have pushed the Earth system too far.

Humanity is at the centre of the Anthropocene. The fate of the Earth is in our hands. We have now assumed responsibility for Nature – flora and fauna – whether we like it or not. As Clive Hamilton says, "Morality is not to be found in the realm of freedom, but in the realm of necessity, because our duty of care precedes all else."



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Baza in the bushes



A Pacific Baza
perches quietly in
dense foliage

by Scott O'Keeffe

In last month's article I discussed how the cryptic forms and behaviours of stick insects help them to avoid predators. One of their predators is the Pacific Baza (*Aviceda cristata*), a medium sized bird of prey that's easy to see locally, if you go looking for it.

As the photo shows, it's a striking bird. The largely grey adults are boldly marked with broad reddish bars across the chest. Their heads have an erect crest and they have bright yellow eyes. If you're lucky, you might see one performing its signature aerial display. These consist of steep plunges with the wings partly closed. As the bird approaches the ground it will suddenly swoop up in a steep climb. The full display consists of a series of these dives and ascents while the birds emit loud musical calls.

Bazas are resident along the eastern side of Australia from the coast up to 300 km inland. They are also found in the Top End, PNG, Timor, the Solomon Islands and parts of Indonesia. They don't undertake large migrations and are largely sedentary. However, they will make local movements in response to adverse conditions and food availability. They move relatively short distances between upland to lowland areas, and from inland areas towards the coast. This is what is occurring when Bazas suddenly appear in urban areas when hedge grasshoppers (*Valanga irregularis*) have population explosions that coincide with dry conditions in the Bush. When Bazas wander, they are sometimes seen in small groups of up to 15 birds.

The Baza has some unusual hunting techniques that enable them to find and capture concealed prey. Bazas cruise just above the tree canopy or along the edges of forest fragments searching for stick insects, grasshoppers and other insects that make up the bulk of their diet. They also take small frogs, reptiles and birds concealed in canopy foliage. They also hunt by perching within the canopy where they remain still and watchful. When small movements betray the presence of their prey, these swift birds pounce on the meal.

Australian Bazas breed between September and February. They lay two to three eggs on a small platform of sticks in a forked tree branch. Eggs are frequently lost in storms. Any chicks that survive need two years to fully mature.

Historically, Bazas preferred wet eucalypt forests, swamps, mangroves and savannahs, all of which support trees at moderate densities or at high densities in discrete clusters. Riparian forests were favoured for nesting.

The fragmentation of original forests with dense tree canopies created an abundance of edges that increase the accessibility of the tree canopy making it easier for the Bazas to hunt using their particular search strategies.

For an ecologist this is a very interesting species. Bazas demonstrate how some native animals are able to adapt to new ecological conditions in altered landscapes. Bazas are probably more common in Northern Rivers now than they were before European settlement.

I've seen these birds around Stoney Chute and Goolmangar. They are frequently spotted in the Lismore area, including city parks and at Wollongbar, Rocky Lake and Mullumbimby. If you enjoy wildlife photography this species is an interesting subject. A bit of searching is required to find Bazas, but they are reasonably approachable and worth the effort. Their striking appearance and spectacular displays make them very photogenic.

Email Scott O'Keeffe at: malurus@posteo.net

Sounds like turtles

by Scott O'Keeffe ecologist

When we think about the physical components of ecosystems, we immediately imagine tangible things like stone, soil and water. But there are other amorphous phenomena, like sound, that link organisms and ecosystems together.

Sound is used by an enormous number of vertebrate and invertebrate species for communicating, navigating, feeding and avoiding predation. Millions of birds, cicadas, bees, crickets, and mammals surround us with a stream of vibrations from all parts of the audio spectrum, including many that we cannot hear, but only detect with special equipment.

Recently, some bright spark decided to drop some of that special equipment into the water. It turns out that the water is a very noisy place, and a lot of that noise is made by aquatic animals. Among the vocalists are turtles. On reflection this makes sense.

The first zoologist to drop a hydrophone into the water was studying Australia's northern long-necked turtle (*Chelodina oblonga*). It's an ambush predator that inhabits turbid waters in tropical rivers, streams and billabongs in Australia's Top End. It preys upon small fish, frogs and insect larvae.

Zoologists studying the species used hydrophones to record what (if any) sounds were being made by these turtles while submerged. They found that the long-necked turtles produced a variety of percussive and complex sounds in 17 categories. Repeated and sustained vocalisations occurred during breeding, suggesting a breeding display or advertising a territory.

Apart from the sounds emitted during breeding, there

were many other kinds of vocalisations whose functions we can only speculate about. The waters where these turtles live are stained heavily by tannins and other substances that limit light transmission. Communicating with sound over distances beyond visual range makes sense in this environment.

The discovery of underwater vocalisations in this species has a very important practical application. Since its populations are declining, being able to detect the turtles by vocalisation may be useful for monitoring its populations.

Ecologists studying vocalising in the endangered Chinese stripe-necked turtle (*Mauremys sinensis*) found something similar. This species is more aquatic than many other species of freshwater turtles. It lives in deep slow current pools where light transmission is limited.

Once again, a variety of sounds are produced by these turtles. In one study, ten types of 'calls' were recorded. These consisted of both high and low frequency calls with females emitting more high frequency sounds. Some of the calls are made mostly during courtship displays.

This kind of research is still in its infancy. As it progresses, more and more species of turtles are found to be 'singers'. For example, the pig-nosed turtle (*Carettochelys insculpta*), from Northern Australia and PNG, produces three simple calls. The giant river turtle (*Podocnemis expansa*) from South America produces at least 11 complex calls which contain many harmonics.

The invasive American red-eared slider turtle (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) produces 12 types of underwater vocalisations with wide variation in character and frequency. The sliders even produce some sounds that exceed frequencies outside their known hearing range.



Saw-shelled turtles can handle murky water, but can they sing?



The northern long-necked turtle sings in Top End billabongs

These observations led researchers to speculate that the type and variety of calls made by sliders may allow them to outcompete native species when they invade new environments. Sliders have become a problematic invasive species worldwide, so this finding might help conservation biologists better understand how they displace native turtles.

What these pieces of research demonstrate is that vocalisation in turtles is not an isolated phenomenon. Many species of aquatic turtles produce sounds and that each seems to have a unique repertoire. Further, there are patterns in the types of sounds each species makes and the circumstances under which they are produced.

Effort is required to vocalise. Singing turtles are producing a lot of sound and expending a lot of energy, but not at random. Living things can't afford to waste energy, so a solid conclusion is that this water music has a function.

The water in the dam at my place, and in the local creek supports lots of saw-shelled turtles (*Myuchelys latisternum*), but as far as I can tell, no other turtle species. I wonder why? Saw-shelled turtles are known for their ability to live in turbid or muddy water. This new science makes me wonder whether saw-shelled turtles do well here because they are such good singers.

Someone needs to drop a hydrophone into the creek so we can hear what's going on.

Plant of the month



Celery Wood
Polyscias elegans

by Richard Burer

The last day of summer and there's a lot to choose from in the forest flower world. Bloodwood is putting on a bit of a show and Large Leaf Privet brings the pigeons back to our valleys, but who wants to hear about Large Leaf Privet?

So let's bring back an old favourite, with this summer bringing on a very extensive flower display from my old friend and trusty all-rounder, Celery Wood, *Polyscias elegans*.

Often described as a handsome tree, Celery Wood's umbrella-shaped foliage shapes the landscape and warms the heart. In regenerating forest, its straight habit emerging out of the canopy makes for stunning environmental possibilities, with quick cover relished by humans and fauna.

Often planted as a pioneer tree or

included in a rainforest mix, Celery Wood grows fast and in short time produces a purple succulent drupe eaten by many birds including fig bird, cat bird, Lewins Honeyeater, rainforest pigeons and Rose-crowned Fruit Dove.

Common in the area, especially in secondary rainforest and rainforest margins, in particular after disturbance, and growing to 30m, this straight-growing tree is surprisingly disregarded in the evolving cabinet timber industry, despite growing as long as 100 years old.

Locally I've seen massive under 100-year old trees in Wompoo Gorge on the edge of the Nightcap, and it's very common in the Nimbin area.

Available at your local rainforest nursery where it's a popular tree in rainforest regeneration. Celery Wood is an excellent all-round tree for the garden, on the farm and in your conservation area.

Richard Burer is a Nimbin-based natural area restoration contractor and consultant: richard.burer@gmail.com



by Suzy Maloney

Food, safety and sex

There are many things that are important to horses, with these three high up. After thinking about it I find that many things easily fit into one of these categories.

Food: Horses have a huge obsession with eating. They are large animals who naturally live on grass, a low nutrient feed, so lots of it is needed. They're called trickle feeders, as they graze 17 to 18 hours a day. You can imagine spending so much time eating results in a brain hard wired for eating.

Because of this ongoing intake of small amounts of food, their stomachs release a constant small stream of digestive acids. If a horse is denied food for long periods, as in some stabling situations, they can develop stomach ulcers from these acids that eat into the stomach lining. For horses, eating is no small thing.

Knowing how important food is to horses helps us be more understanding when we see horses exhibit what can seem outrageous behaviours in association with food and eating. It also explains why positive reinforcement training techniques using food are so effective. Reinforcing desired behaviours with food increases the likelihood of

the horse repeating that behaviour enormously and creates motivation in the horse.

Conversely, people who randomly give horses treats or give it before the desired behaviour, otherwise called bribery, may end up with rude and pushy horses. This is not the fault of the horse, they are just very motivated by food, it's up to us to ensure we're aware of which behaviours we are reinforcing with food.

Safety: Anyone who has spent time around horses will testify to the importance of safety to horses. It can be hard for us to comprehend just how fearful horses can be. To us they're big and strong and shouldn't be scared by 90 percent of the things that do scare them. To the horse, they are prey, and anything different or scary has the potential to be a predator who kills and eats them.

Just because we've domesticated horses does not mean this deep belief within them has been removed. It's present in every horse; the knowledge that other creatures see them as meat to be eaten. I was once charged by a male lion while on safari in Africa, and it's not a feeling you forget. Horses do not know they're in Australia. In their minds there could be a lion or tiger around the very next corner or lurking in that bush.

It's important for us to be aware of how real this is for horses and take it seriously. If we accept this side of horses, it's much easier to work with. A few days ago, a horse I was working with suddenly exploded from absolute calm to full blown panic. In one second the rope was gone from my hand, and he was halfway down the paddock.

Not having a horse's acute awareness of the surroundings, I looked around and

could not see a thing. He, however, was head high focused on a distant point. I walked a bit toward that point and stood there looking at it, then I walked to him, stood beside him and we both looked together. He so appreciated that I registered his message and took him seriously. He dropped his head, I picked up the lead rope, and we continued as if nothing had happened. If you understand your horses fear, you can help them with it rather than fighting it.

Sex: Many of us do not see a lot of sexual behaviour as most male domestic horses are gelded. However, if you have a mare, you will see how interested the geldings still are when mares are in season. I saw my three geldings take it in turns to mount my mare one year when she was in season.

Mares exhibit more sexual behaviours than geldings as they have not been desexed. Their behaviours can also be very influenced by where they are in their cycle. In the wild and on studs, sex plays a huge part in horses' lives. Many stallion behaviours are associated with gaining mares, keeping them, and mating.

Trying to understand what's important to horses, and what motivates them, makes life so much easier for us and the horses. They are a very different species to us, and if we open ourselves up to that we can love and appreciate this difference.

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Alone with a horse



by Les Rees

Riding alone has always been important for me and it has certainly caused some consternation amongst some of my friends who feel let down when I say no to an offer to go for a ride together. Sadly, I find myself making excuses so as not to offend them.

For me, time spent with my horses is a special experience that enriches our relationship and opens the door to engaging with one another. I want to be there in the moment. I want to feel what my horses feel, to see what my horses see, to smell what my horses smell in order to open my view into understanding the world they inhabit. It isn't possible to do that when another human is present as it distracts us from listening to our horses.

To be with a horse is to be in the moment, to be present with them the whole time because this is when the magic happens. As you learn about each other the conversation begins breaking

down the barriers between our different ways of engaging with the world around us, finding ways to communicate and be happy to share new experiences together.

For me it's important to remove the awareness of time because it creates too many expectations. When we're governed by time we tend to be thinking ahead drawing ourselves away from the importance of being in the present with our horses.

The impetuous nature of humans often speeds up the way in which we engage with animals and this can be very confusing for them to understand. I've seen many people behaving badly towards their horses who are on the receiving end of irrational responses due to a breakdown in understanding of what is required of them.

For me it's more important to ask politely if my horse would like to join me in doing something interesting and fun for both of us. I find that many things can be learnt when out riding. It's a matter of taking advantage of the

moments that present themselves and being creative in the way you deal with them.

You may involve something active like jumping a log or going for a gallop up a hill. Or it may involve me dropping the reins and allowing the horse to make the decisions about where it would like to go. I've learnt a huge amount about horses from doing this.

One thing is that horses quite like to retrace their tracks in order to check out the smells they either missed or found interesting. Sometimes they will break into a trot or a canter just for fun. All of my horses choose to stay out for much longer than I would have chosen because they're having fun engaging with the world outside of their home environment.

If your horse is fearful of something don't be afraid to get off, there's no shame in doing so. Be the person out in front saying "Don't worry! I've got your back." If you show them that all is safe and allow the horse as much time as it needs to engage its mind on the problem, it will learn to trust you and just as importantly, you will learn to trust your horse. If you get cross, you'll set up a barrier between you and trust will take a backwards step.

I'm not really a fan of competitive riding because it often sets people up to seek the attention of their peers and in doing so they neglect to listen to their horses. Competition is all about the pressure of winning, and for some, putting too many expectations on horses that are often not ready to achieve them.

So treat your horses kindly and give them all the time it takes to make the magic happen.

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