

Cattana Capers

Newsletter for Cattana Wetlands Environmental Park



Jabiru Lake – our office

Photo: courtesy Denise Crew.

Your visit – 'Fabulous and Free'

CATTANA'S INCREDIBLE STORY

Cattana Wetlands was originally an 80 hectare cane farm owned and operated by the Cattana family. It was purchased by Mulgrave Shire Council in 1993 to develop a sand pit. Habitat restoration commenced when mining ceased, and the site was opened as a public park by an amalgamated Cairns Regional Council in 2009.

The protection of 30 hectares of feather palm forest and restoration of the Wetlands is an incredible story, achieved by passionate Council officers and volunteers - predominantly through Council's '*Green Space, Our Place*' program.

Our bird list is testament to this success with 228 species noted in the fourth edition (David Anderson) to be published in 2026. Cattana is currently in the top 20 Australian birding hotspots (eBird, Australia), and provides considerable support to Cairns' economy through birding tourism.

Enjoy

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Wonderful news !!!!!!!!!!!!!, from Rhonda Coghlan

Cr Rhonda Coghlan has recently forwarded this wonderful news - 'Cattana Wetlands is currently scheduled for consideration as part of the 2027 Neighbourhood Murals Project'. Only two murals are financed by Council each year, on a Division basis. This is our opportunity to introduce the wow factor at Cattana's entry – 'first impressions count'.



Figure 1. Photos don't do justice to this mural which was painted by Livinia at Julatten library. It is a tourist attraction and well known by the birding fraternity.

The Dillenia dilemma

Habitat restoration depends on reliable identification of plant species, particularly for seed collection, because ecosystems are adapted to and depend on particular local species.

At least two species of *Dillenia* have been cultivated in Cairns – our native Red Beech (*Dillenia alata*), and the exotic Simpoh Air (*D. suffruticosa*, ID by Google Lens), which is a weed ('any plant that is growing where it is not wanted'). For example, in Smithfield Village Drive (near the intersection with Reed Rd), both species have been planted in the median strip and often produce beautiful yellow flowers. Unfortunately *suffruticosa* was mistakenly planted at Cattana, and reproduced. It has since been removed.

Figure 2 below. *Dillenia suffruticosa*, commonly known as Simpoh Air, is not endemic to Australia. Its defining features include:-

- ◆ **A winged petiole:** The leaf lamina (flat part of the leaf) tapers smoothly down to the petiole (the slender stalk that connects a leaf blade to the main stem of a plant), creating distinct green flanges or wings along the stalk.
- ◆ **Leaf margins:** The edges are finely dentate (toothed).



Figure 3 above. *Dillenia alata*, commonly known as Red Beech, is a beautiful tree endemic to coastal areas of Queensland. It is best known by its red flaky bark and yellow flowers. The petiole is broad and flattened, with conspicuous leafy wings. The leaf margins are 'entire', meaning that they are smooth with no teeth or serrations.

Comedy relief

**I'm proud of myself.
I finished a jigsaw
puzzle in 6 months,
and the box said 2-4
years!**

25 / 26 Planting season

The 25 / 26 planting season provided good growing conditions, especially for weeds. Nearly 2,000 tube stock have been planted, mostly to increase ground cover for insects and ground-dwelling marsupials.

Zone 6 (raptor tower) is proving to be a difficult site with a lot of variation in soils and drainage, and persistent infestations of Singapore daisy and Sickie-pod – the seed bank for Sickie-pod is viable for 10 years.

Special thanks to Gerard Cattana and Dave O'Brien for their assistance.

Possum platter, by Denis

Wildlife nestboxes were first installed at Cattana Wetlands in November 2020.

Nestbox no. 6 has produced 4 generations of Krefft's gliders, and box no. 40 has had three generations.

Gliders first used nestboxes after three and a half months, but now new boxes are occupied after only one week.

One inspection revealed nine Striped Possums in nine separate boxes; with other inhabitants including microbats, Lace Monitors, and Giant White-tailed Rats.

Feral Asian Honeybees, Green Tree Frogs and White-lipped Green Tree Frogs live harmoniously in nestboxes with gliders.

Nestboxes have been a very successful interim measure, as scientists have found that tree hollows can take over 100 years to develop fully.

Batting about, from Denise

Denise reports an additional four species of microbat from her last survey results:-

- ◆ Little Bent-winged Bat (*Miniopterus australis*), Qld status - least concern.
- ◆ Eastern Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus megaphyllus*), Qld status - least concern.
- ◆ Hoary Wattled Bat (*Chalinolobus nigrogriseus*), Qld status - least concern.
- ◆ Ride's Free-tailed Bat (*Ozimops ridei*), Qld status – least concern.

Our species list currently totals 10, two of which have significant conservation value:-

- ◆ Coastal sheath-tailed bat (*Taphozous australis*). Qld status – [Near Threatened](#).
- ◆ Bare-rumped sheath-tailed bat (*Saccolaimus saccolaimus*). Qld status – [Endangered](#); Commonwealth status - [Critically Endangered](#).

The Mystery Mauler

A **Giant White-tailed Rat** (*Uromys caudimaculatus*, one of tropical north Queensland's largest native rodents) was recently found dead near the signboard shelter. This was considered exceptional given their climbing ability.

The rear (or 'dorsal') of its neck was severely lacerated, with a large wound extending down one side to the rib-cage. There did not appear to be any attempt to consume parts of the head or intestines, which contain the most nutritious organs.

Lo and behold!!!! A second victim was discovered near the jetty, this time with minor lacerations to the dorsal neck.

Much head scratching – cat? Dog / dingo?, Scrubby (Amethystine python)? = sore head. What about a **Rufous owl?**, which has a killing method synonymous with these injuries. To find your answer check:-

'Rufous owl (*Nino rufa*) diet and breeding in an urban forest remnant in Northeastern Queensland', Goulding, W. & **Venables, B***, The Sunbird (2012) 42(1): 1-10

Available online at:

https://birdsqueensland.org.au/sunbird_issues/articles/Vol_42/Goulding_2012_v42_1_1-10.pdf, or do an assisted AI search.

*Brian Venables is a local Cairns Birder.

BUT WAIT!!!!!!!!!!!! – there's more. Alberto Vale of the Australian Quoll Conservancy reckons it may have been a Northern Quoll. This leads into '**Cattana's Quest for Quolls**', featured in the next edition of Capers.

A surge in Salvinia

Salvinia (*Salvinia molesta*), a floating fern, is one of 32 Weeds of National Significance (WoNS) in Australia and ranks among the world's worst aquatic weeds. An infestation in Jabiru Lake and Crake Pond is resisting efforts by NAM (CRC's Natural Areas Management team) to remove it, but it must be eradicated before restoration work begins.

In good conditions *Salvinia* could cover the Lakes, preventing light penetration and production of oxygen, thus causing the death of aquatic ecosystems – the Lake 'dies' or becomes eutrophic.

The Jabirus have cultivated hundreds of sedges ready to restore affected edges of the Lakes. Capers will keep you posted!



Figure 4, left. Council signage on Crake Pond where *Salvinia* is currently proliferating.
Figure 5, right. *Salvinia* adjacent to the jetty and in amongst dead leaves of Native hibiscus (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*).

I hate it when
people act all
intellectual and talk
about Mozart, while
they've never even
seen one of his
paintings...

Summer of Science: 'Take a Walk on the Wildside'

More than 30 visitors, including children, attended our first tour of the season on Saturday 20th June. The weather was fantastic. Many thanks to our dedicated tour guides – Annie n Dave (birds), Denise (microbats), Matthew (plants n bugs), and Denis – 'possum boxes'.

*Don't forget our FREE 'MICROBAT NIGHT'
on Saturday 18nd July, starting at 5.30pm in the carpark.*

Circulation

Capers is currently circulated to **Green Space** volunteers and 800 Cairns Birders with their fantastic newsletter 'The New Frogmouth', and a new website - congratulations.

All great promotion for Cairns' tourism!

Feed back

'Thanks Geoff for the regular updates. I look forward to them.' - Rhonda Coghlan - our most supportive Councillor.

'Excellent newsletter, I really enjoyed it.' - Jude Friesen – long term supporter of Cattana and a Cairns Birder.

Join the Jabirus

Join the Jabirus, and learn how to restore natural habitats with like-minded people on Tuesday mornings. Phone **Melanie** (0437 028 864), Team Leader of Cairns Regional Council's '**Green Space, Our Place**' volunteer program, also convened at various sites throughout the city.

Cheers, from your scribe.

To **unsubscribe** from 'Capers', please email: crococonsult@gmail.com

PS. Confucious said (well-I-I,,, maybe): "I bought some 'rocket salad' yesterday but it went off before I could eat it!"