

Extinct frog hops back into the gene pool

On March 15, the Sydney Morning Herald carried an exclusive story by Nicky Phillips under the above headline.

"In what may be considered an early Easter miracle," it said, "an extinct species of native frog has begun its rise from the dead."

It told of the work of the aptly named Lazarus team that had grown embryos containing the revived DNA of our very own, gastric-brooding frog *Rheobatrachus silus*, the crucial first step in their attempt to bring a species back to life. The process was quite similar to the technique used to create the cloned sheep Dolly, several years back.

The project was only possible due to the foresight of Adelaide frog researcher, Mike Tyler, who froze a *Rheobatrachus* specimen before it disappeared from the wild in 1979 and became extinct in 1983.

"This is the first time this technique has been achieved for an extinct species," said one of the project scientists, conservation biologist Professor Michael Mahony.

The article explained that "Over five years the team, led by University of NSW palaeontologist Mike Archer, painstakingly inserted DNA extracted from a frozen specimen of the bizarre gastric-brooding frog, which incubated its eggs in its stomach before giving birth through its mouth, into hundreds of donor eggs from a distant relative, the great barred frog, whose DNA had been deactivated by UV light.

In the beginning, the single cell eggs "just sat there", said Professor Archer. "But then, all of a sudden, one of the cells divided, and then it divided again, and again.

"There were a lot of high fives around the laboratory at that point," said Professor Archer, who was to announce the team's achievement at the TEDxDeExtinction event in Washington.

While the embryos had yet to develop into tadpoles, genetic tests revealed the dividing cells contained the DNA of the extinct frog.

"We do expect to get this guy hopping again," Professor Archer is reported as saying.

Back here in the Conondales I find it difficult to share in those high fives. The incredible unfolding story of *Rheobatrachus* is inextricably intertwined with the history of conservation in the Conondales.

I've talked with Greg Roberts and Greg Czechura, Chris Corben and Glen Ingram who were just young students when they found a "new frog" as they did field work in the Conondales, then threatened with clear-

felling for the establishment of massive hoop pine plantations.

Whilst they weren't exactly plentiful, there was nothing to suggest that, within a couple of decades, they'd be extinct. The quite accidental discovery of their unique gastric brooding for their tadpoles was initially treated with some scepticism by the scientific community, leading to another common name, the "platypus frog".

I've heard Greg Czechura at a frog day, imitate the call of a *Rheobatrachus* and then add that he would be the only person in the room to have heard one. In the days when there was still optimism that there may have been survivors, I've sat out there by the falls at Bundaroo Creek with researcher Adrian Borsbaum as he played taped Rheo calls hoping there might be an answer.

The general view seems to be that the Chytrid fungus imported with toads from South Africa that once were used in pregnancy testing, brought about

the demise of not only *Rheobatrachus* but also the Southern Day Frog, *Taudactylus diurnus*, and a few others besides. Last year we learnt of the work of Dr Michael Towsey from the QUT who has built sound recording gear and software that can identify, among other things, the call of *Rheobatrachus*.

So I'm afraid I can't help but wonder what will lie beyond the

"wow factor" in the work of the Lazarus project.

I can't see a viable population of Rheos returning to the creeks of the Conondales, all sourced from the DNA from a single specimen in Mike Tyler's fridge and I still confess to a shy hope that, somewhere, in some isolated corner of the Conondales, in a place untouched by the mycelia of the Chytrid fungus, some *Rheobatrachus* live on.

I'd love to think that one day Michael Towsey might discover on his recording gear, the calls of *Rheobatrachus* seeking a mate.

That's the day I'll be doing high fives.

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/animals/extinct-frog-hops-back-into-the-gene-pool-20130315-2g68x.html#ixzz2Nmzwb1qq>

Mike Tyler's book

"There's a frog in my stomach" is unfortunately out of print.



Giant Barred Frog Eva Ford



Drawing Elli Schlunke

Presidential Ponderings

The astute newsletter reader will have noticed a new name for the veteran Conondale Range Committee (and even a new logo).

On 18 November 2012, after duly giving notice, we held a special meeting to discuss becoming an incorporated association and to review our original formation aim from 1976, to "press for an expanded National Park in the Conondales"

Back in the early nineties when a major park expansion was announced as a result of the ground-breaking Conondales Consultative process, we had a brief debate about our ongoing role since our original aim had been achieved. Once the celebration had died down (who can forget it, out there in the overflow area at Charlie Moreland?) we decided that we definitely still had a role in keeping a watchful eye over the Conondales and Mary valley. And it proved to be a good decision.

At that stage there was still unfinished business at the abandoned Agricola goldmine and this was completed some years later following persistent lobbying, another consultative committee, and some dedicated work by Dr Rob Savory, environment officer with the then Mines department.

Since then, we've been involved in negotiations in the South East Queensland Forest Agreement and the planning of the Conondale Great Walk and even a couple of working bees to assist in its construction.

A couple of members continue voluntarily to undertake track work on the Great Walk and work at the Summer Falls campground.

In short our activities have changed quite a deal

since our inception in 1976.

We've articulated our new aims as shown below and these were endorsed unanimously at the November meeting, as was the decision to become incorporated.

The objectives of the association are to promote the conservation and protection of the natural and cultural values of the Conondale Range region, including the Conondale National Park, and environs, through:

Community volunteer-based natural resource management programs including weed control, track and asset maintenance and environmental rehabilitation and restoration;

Collaborations with the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service and other State and Local Government environmental management agencies in the region;

Collaborations with other regional community based natural resource management groups;

Production of educational and interpretive programs and publications on the values of the region and other natural resource management activities as agreed by the membership from time to time.

The natural resource manage focus of our modified aims meant that we would fit under the umbrella of QWaLC, the body set up to cover public liability matters for Landcare and related NRM groups throughout the state.

We have since applied for and been accepted for membership of that group.

The first public show of the new CRC will be our annual Information stall and display at the Kenilworth Food, Wine & Cheese Festival in Kenilworth on Easter Saturday, 7am to 3pm. Why not come and join us.

Give Cheryl a ring on 54460350 if you can help out.

**Come & see us at the Kenilworth Cheese Wine & Food Fest on Easter Saturday
We will have our display stall with lots of information & the latest on Great Walk**



Entertainment

Linsey Pollak, world renowned musician, making and playing instruments from rubber gloves, carrots and watering cans. Linsey will perform his solo show at the Food Fest. See our website for the time. www.kenilworthfoodfest.org.au

Make sure to bring the kids to the **CHEESTER EGG HUNT** Register at 9am Ages 4-7
Kenilworth is home to Queensland's only **CHEESE ROLLING COMPETITION** See the Big Easter Egg

When
Easter Saturday
30 March 2013

Sample Kenilworth's award winning gourmet cheese, yogurts and ice creams!

Spend the day tasting the unique range of the Mary Valley's finest foods, liqueurs and wines. A Farm to Fork Feast!
Come on a country adventure to meet the growers and producers of the Valley's fine fare!

Kenilworth
Cheese
Wine & Food
Fest

Easter Saturday
30 March 2013
7am-4pm
Entry Free

Kenilworth Park and Cheese Factory

Park Updates

Park staff have been very busy getting campgrounds and walking tracks open for Easter following Cyclone Oswald and other rain events.

Booloumba campgrounds One, Three & Four are all open. Day-use area (B2), the start of the Conondale Range Great Walk, suffered considerable damage. It is open but the crossing is definitely 4WD only, the other two creek crossings are also recommended 4WD access. The walking track is open from the start to Booloumba Falls & Breadknife.

The track to Mt Allen from B2 is also open.

Charlie Moreland campground is open, the road through to Jimna is closed at six mile creek bridge near Kilcoy Road.



The slip covering Mt Allen track

Mt Allen The walking track to the tower from Charlie Moreland is overgrown, park staff hope to have it slashed by the weekend (Easter). There is also a large slip about 750m from the tower blocking access unless you are a bit adventurous. Park staff hope to have it moved but its not definite at this stage. The long grass around the tower itself has been slashed. It's certainly worth the walk as the 360 views from the top of the tower are quite spectacular.

A Spot of Frogging in the Conondales

Late last year, despite the (then) generally dry conditions, I joined Eva Ford of the Mary river catchment Coordinating Committee and Lesley eagles of Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service for a night of frog spotting in the Conondales.

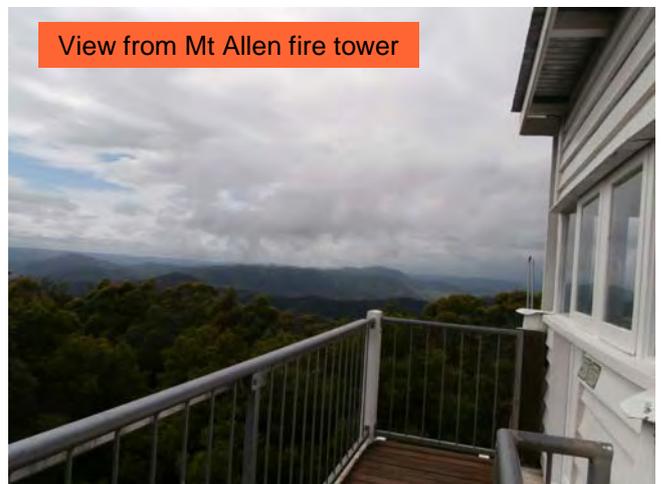
Eva's acquired something of a reputation as "the frog lady" for her work with frogs in the Sunshine Coast hinterland and many of her summer evenings are spent in the proximity of streams, listening and looking. While she's yet to make the momentous re-discovery of any Rheobatrachus, she's certainly found other rare frogs (like the Giant Barred Frog) in areas where it had previously not been recorded. We explored Summer Creek in the area just upstream



B2 Creek Crossing after the flood



B2 - a section of the car park



View from Mt Allen fire tower

of the road crossing but without enormous success, probably not surprising given the record dry spell we were experiencing, and we moved down to the Booloumba Creek crossings on the way in to the campgrounds.

Booloumba at this point is a very stony creek but we were quite unprepared for the number of Stony Creek Frogs that we encountered. From wherever you stood, you could easily spot ten or so of the smaller yellow males, either perched on rocks or in amplexus with a (rather larger) female. It made for a memorable night.



Dam Folly

This year's late-in coming wet season in the wake of ex-tropical cyclone Oswald, along with follow-up floods, certainly brought the frogs out aplenty. It also brought out a different chorus, that of those clamouring for the building of more dams as a form of flood-proofing.

The logic, at first glance, is delightfully simple. Dams hold water, right, so if a dam can hold back at least some of the volume of a flood, both its depth and its duration should be able to be lessened.

A little reality check could perhaps be brought to bear when you realise the extent of the flooding along the Burnett River just to our north.

The impacts of the flooding around Mundubbera and Gayndah were enormous, as were those experienced in Bundaberg, closer to the river's mouth. And yet the Burnett river and its tributaries already accommodate around 30 dams and weirs, the most recent being the controversial Paradise Dam near Biggenden with its equally controversial fish ladder.

If you head further northward, residents of Emerald were assured years ago that construction of the massive Fairbairn Dam would protect them against flooding. The reality has been far from that promise with Emerald actually experiencing worse flooding after the dam was built.

Graphic visuals of the flood three or four years back that had water breaching inadequate levee banks and thundering into open cut coal mines, submerging giant draglines in the process, aren't easy to forget.

And it wasn't a one-off. Emerald has actually had worse since.

It's generally acknowledged that dam proposals have three things in common, the construction costs are underestimated, the impacts are underestimated and the benefits are considerably overstated.

In the case of flooding-reduction, it's not hard to

Sunday Creek Road to Jimna re-opens (briefly)

Just as long-awaited work to repair the Sunday Creek Road had been finalised, ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald brought a whole new bunch of headaches for infrastructure in the Conondales.

Sunday Creek Road had been damaged by a landslide after heavy rains a couple of years back, in the area of the lookout not far beyond Charlie Moreland Park and had necessitated a circuitous detour for access to the Summer Creek Falls area. It seems it had taken some time to sort out whose responsibility it was to carry out the repairs.

It was sorted out, however, and the road reopened

see why.

If you could have taken an aerial "whole of river" snapshot of the Mary (or the Burnett or the Fitzroy or whatever) at the time of flood and compared the sheer volume of flood water with what could be housed in a dam, you'd see the futility. And that's even making the assumption that the dam was empty when the flood rains began.

There is a fundamental contradiction between a storage dam and a flood mitigation dam that is often overlooked. Brisbane's Wivenhoe Dam has a foot in both camps, but as has emerged in the wash-up after Brisbane's 2011 floods, the operation of a dam during flooding is absolutely critical.

It seems like this wasn't an issue with Paradise Dam in this year's Australia Day floods however. It's my understanding that the dam's outlet mechanism had been damaged in the 2011 floods and that the dam hadn't been able to release any water since that time and actually went into this year's flood event at just under full.

During the flooding, the radio carried reports of water thundering eight metres over the spillway (and Paradise has an exceptionally wide spillway) but it now seems that water was only a metre or so off breaching the entire width of the wall.

It's completely understandable to want to reduce the damage and heartache that follows flooding. It's completely understandable to want to make communities more resilient, to be able to bounce back when floods do inevitably occur but it seems that any steps in this direction need to be well thought through and have some sound basis in hydrological fact.

If they don't, they run the risk of simply giving a false sense of security.

To me, the call to build 100 "flood-proofing" dams across the nation would do just that.

only weeks before this summer's dry-then-wet season landed. As Oswald meandered down from the north it dropped a staggering amount of rain causing flooding right down into New South Wales. Its north to south movement, and the particularly heavy falls in the creeks on the western side of the Mary's catchment lead to considerable damage. Residents of the Booloumba Creek area, for example, described heavy damage along the lower part of the creek before it enters Little Yabba, and the point where Little Yabba itself enters the Mary showed significant erosion. It was reminiscent of an earlier flood in the nineties which washed away the Little Yabba bridge.

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Trail Bike Riders trash walking track (once again!)

Yet again trail bikes have caused major destruction on a section of the Hinterland Great Walk accessed from Sam Kelly Road at Gheerulla (near Kenilworth). During the Christmas New Year holidays bikes caused damage to the track. And again last weekend bikes have caused considerable damage to sections of the track.

Disappointing behavior by a few trail bike riders has resulted in significant damage to a world class walking track in the Kenilworth area.

The walking tracks, used extensively by locals, national and international visitors show case the wonderful Blackall Range including Montville, Flaxton, Mapleton and lead to Kenilworth on the Gheerulla loop.

The section of track from Gheerulla Campground to Thilba Thalba walkers camp which is accessed from Sam Kelly Road has sustained a considerable amount of damaged from inappropriate use by trail bike riders. The scenic,



steep track is now covered in loose rocks, gravel and loose dirt. There are steep sections with extensive rock steps that are now dislodged and track edges eroded and gouged out from motor bike tires.

Loose rocks make the track dangerous especially in some of the steeper sections.

The track is well signed for walkers only, and signs also indicate the area is off limits to motor bikes.

The Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service provide Gheerulla campground including an extensive purpose build off road motor bike track for licensed bike riders.

In addition most State Forest areas with 4WD tracks (fire trails) are now available for trail bike riders except if they are signed otherwise.

Sadly a few irresponsible riders have spoiled it for all users. If these two tracks can't co-exist maybe the bike track should be moved or closed?

This mindless destruction has resulted in more work for Parks staff when they are in the middle of repairing tracks and roads from extensive flood damage. Trying desperately to get it all finished for the big Easter recreation rush.



Mary River Festival looks to make a big splash in 2013

Organisers are well into planning for this year's Mary River Festival in Kandanga on Saturday, November 9.

Much-needed rain for last year's event wasn't exactly what they'd hoped for, but it failed to dampen the spirits of those attending.

Festival organiser Joolie Gibbs says the festival, now in its sixth year, was going from strength to strength.

"The spirit behind last year's festival was wonderful," said Joolie. "The number of volunteer hours spent just in logistical planning, long before the day itself, was truly staggering. Then, in the month or two beforehand, it was a real delight to watch the time and the creativity that went into puppet-making and the weaving of Coomba the giant 3metre Mary River Turtle.

The timing of this festival marks Peter Garrett's Remembrance Day announcement back in 2009, that consigned the Traveston Dam folly to it's now-defunct status and granted a reprieve to the river.

While this festival partly celebrates the relief that his decision brought, it more particularly looks ahead to help us all become better custodians of the river that runs through our midst, one that Tim Flannery refers to as "not our longest, not our biggest but one of our most interesting".

Mark **November 9 at Kandanga**, in your diary and keep an eye and ear out for pre-event fundraisers.

Volunteer Track Maintenance Crew - updates

Every 2nd Tuesday a group of dedicated bushwalkers & friends spend the day maintaining Great Walk tracks in the Conondales & Hinterland.

Sometimes they have help from a Park Ranger, it can be hard work but brings a sense of achievement that you're maintaining the tracks you enjoy using.

It can be a long day as they meet at 7.30am at the QPWS office at Kenilworth.

If you are interested in becoming involved contact Joe at: bushwacker.joe@gmail.com

Joe & Alf relaxing after helping install the seat at Summer Falls





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 OVER
 THE CONONDALES



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 It's taken 25 years!

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Conondales 'Wilder Side' Books
 Available at:

- *Kenilworth Information Centre
- *Fairhill Native Plants, Yandia
- *Bellbird Teahouse, Kenilworth
- *Coop bookshop Sunshine Coast University
- *Qld Museum Bookshop, Brisbane
- * Barung Landcare, Maleny
- * Rosetta Books, Maleny
- * CRC Mail Order or on line

www.exploreconondales.com

A must for any visitor to the Conondales, this book includes history, a comprehensive bird list, description of walks, recreation and maps of the area. Plus lots of great photos.

...From page 4

Significant damage was inflicted on campgrounds along Booloumba Creek, necessitated their closure for some time. Access to these areas and to the start of the Great Walk continues to be a problem, preventing people with two-wheel drive vehicles equitable access.

The road to Jimna was re-opened just before Christmas then a month after Cyclone Oswald brought heavy rain and damage another major rain event saw Six Mile Creek bridge badly damaged and condemned. It is about 500m from Kilcoy Road so access to Jimna is no more.

