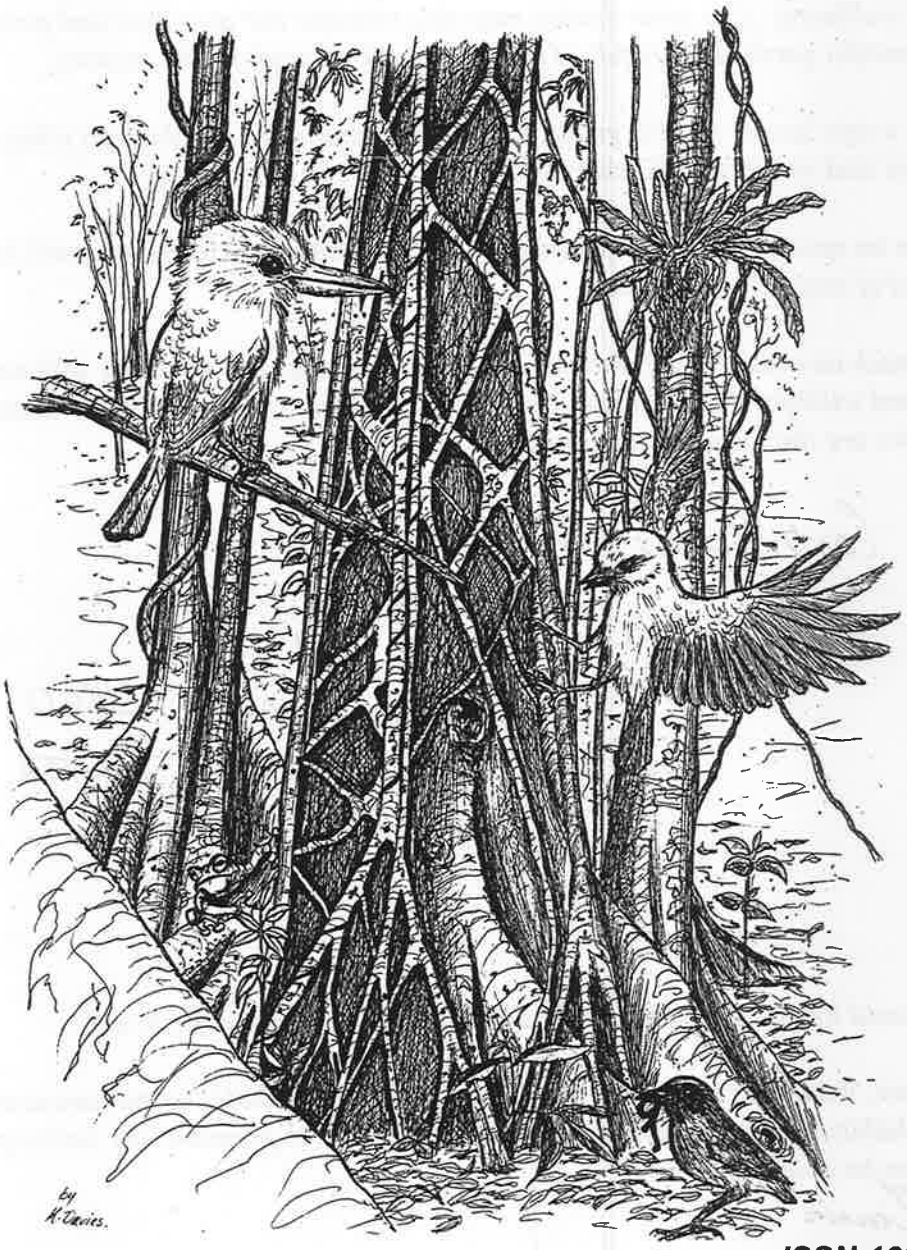
Liaison

WILDLIFE AND NATIVE PLANTS

STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER Number 24.



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INTRODUCTION.

Introductory newsletter for reformed study group Wildlife and Native Plants.

Dear Members,
Welcome to the newly reformed study group.

The main objective of this group is to keep interested members informed of the affinity our native wildlife species and plants have with each other and how we can contribute to their wellbeing. Our contribution may also enhance our own lives and provides us with beautiful gardenscapes full of colour and life throughout the seasons.

As I am a new leader for this group, I would welcome any contributions other readers may have and would wish to share them with others in a newsletter.

We have no specific activities planned for the near future, although you will be informed of any well in advance.

Within each newsletter I will include articles on specific areas dealing with native plants and wildlife. For example; in this issue the Sugar Gliders, Native Grasses and butterflies are the focuss of attention.

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Wildlife + Native Plants
Study Group.

If you would like to contribute or have any questions please write to me.

Remember, wildlife is important to our native plants. Without the movement and feeding habits of many species of wildlife from insects to possums, our native plants would not be able to survive.

K Davies
Kathleen Davies

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BOWERBIRDS OF THE BUSH.

Bowerbirds can be found throughout Australia in many different habitats.

The Catbirds *(Ailuroedus dentirostris* and *A. melanotis)* exist in northen areas of Queensland and east coast New South Wales respectively.

The Tooth-billed Catbird of northern Queensland is restricted to highland rainforests in the areas close to, and including, the Atherton Tablelands. Characterised by its brown colouring, it spends much of its time in the forest canopy feeding on fruit, leaves and insects. Breeding season is from September to January. The leaves of highland rainforest trees feature prominently in this bird's diet.

The Green Catbird occurs in similar areas to the previous bird and also in areas of rainforest near Maryborough, Queensland, extending south as far as Narooma, New South Wales. Depending on the region it comes from, this bird has distinctive spotting of the underparts and bright green upper parts.

These birds are distinctive in their colouring, habit and call, which resembles the sound of a cat. Fruit from rainforest trees, especially figs, and insects are the main food source. Although they are known to steal eggs and baby birds from other nests.

Breeding occurs from September to January and rough nests are often made in crowns of tree ferns or dense tree foliage.

Planting of a dense rainforest garden in the areas where these birds occur may attract them to your garden. Look at such plants as Tree Ferns and Native Figs. Ask at your local native plant nursery about rainforest trees and plants for your area. Rainforests can be established in most areas of Australia depending on the species chosen and the care given to them.

Most east coast areas of New South Wales and Victoria (small area in north Queensland also) play host at times to the Satin Bowerbird *(Ptilonorhynchus violaceus)*. This beautiful bird derives its name from the deep rich blue colour of the male (females and immature young are dull green above and have fine bars below). Fruit forms the major part of this bird's diet, so check your local area for native plants that will grow in your there and bear bird-edible fruit. This is one of the true Bowerbirds in that it builds a bower decorated with, usually blue coloured objects, to attract the female as he dances a display. Breeding is from September to January.

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SUGAR GLIDERS & OTHER GLIDERS.

A lot of Australia's native wildlife is nocturnal in habit – that is they sleep or rest out sight during the daylight hours and emerge to feed and socialise during the night.
The Sugar Gliders *(Petaurus breviceps)* are included in this group of nocturnal creatures. Sugar Gliders sometimes occur near urban areas as well as bushland environments and often become evening meals for introduced species such as cats.

VITAL STATISTICS: Up to 40cm in length (tail 190mm, head & body 170mm); approximately 160g in weight. Bushy tail with distinct black stripe running between the eyes and upper part of the back. Pale grey underside of the body, blue-grey remainder of the body. Wrinkled skin between the fore and hind limbs is evidence of the gliding membrane that is used for gliding between trees of up to 50-60 metres.

FOOD: Nectar, eucalyptus saps and wattle (Acacia) gum are the preferred diet, although insects, vegetable matter, nectar and pollen from Banksia's and Eucalypts are included, as well as bee's nest honey.

HABITAT: Being a social animal, Sugar Gliders rest during the day in hollows (tree cavities, hollow limbs), often with several other family members, emerging at night to forage for food. The hollows are also used for shelter during bad weather and as breeding/nesting sites.
Breeding season for Sugar Gliders is from June to November. Sugar Gliders are marsupials and so, the female has a forwardly facing pouch.

Sugar Gliders can be found from south east South Australia, through Victoria and Tasmania, New South Wales and Queensland along the coastal areas up to Cape York Peninsula. The coastal areas of the Gulf of Carpentaria and most of the Top End of the Northern Territory, the north east part of Western Australia and coastal islands also provide habitat for the Gliders.

One indication that Sugar Gliders may be in your area include grooves cut into the trunks of Eucalypt trees made by the incisor teeth. This is done to extract the sap and family groups will guard these feeding sites and keep the sap flowing at each visit. Another indication (apart from sightings) is the call of the Sugar Gliders which is similar to the yapping of a small dog, or snuffly growling when there is aggression or fighting involved.

To ensure Gliders remain in your area or to encourage them into the area, the protection and planting of suitable habitat and food trees is necessary. Protection of the older growth which provides nesting and shelter hollows will keep the Gliders happy in that department. Eucalypts or any other tree which forms hollows in the trunks or limbs will provide a good home. Planting of extra Eucalypt species native to your area will eventually replace the older growth as it dies and decays, especially if there is no natural regeneration taking place. Any of the large Acacia species will provide gum and insects attracted to the blossoms, which in turn provides food for the Gliders. The Grass Trees (Xanthorrhea sp.), bottlebrushes, Banksias, Hakeas and Grevilleas are favourites for Gliders as well as the blossoms of Eucalypt trees. These provide nectar and pollen which Gliders love plus insects which are attracted to the flowers.

Keep an eye on the cats – Sugar Gliders are a delicacy to them!

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BEAUTIFUL BUTTERFLIES.

Butterflies are a beautiful attraction in gardens as well as in the natural environment. As they go about their business of pollinating flowers and feeding on nectar, their colour amongst the greenery is a pleasure to most observers.

Richmond Birdwing Butterfly.

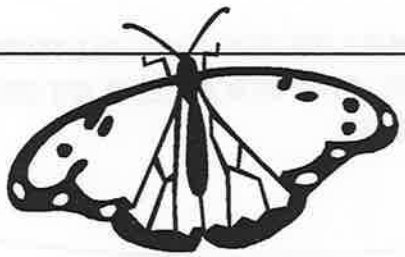
This is one of our rarest butterflies due to the distruction of rainforest habitat and the subsequent loss of its food plant, the Richmond Birdwing Vine. Planting of this food source for the butterfly to lay its eggs on may help to save it, as will the eradication of a plant that is similar to the food plant, but useless as a food source for the newly hatched caterpillars – the Dutchman's Pipe.

Scientific name: Ornithoptera richmondia.

The natural habitat for this butterfly is northern New South Wales and southern Queensland.

Cairns Birdwing Butterfly.

A similar butterfly to the Richmond Birdwing, only slightly larger, being Australia's largest butterfly. The caterpillars of this butterfly feed on *Aristolchia* plants (native vines). Planting of this food plant may encourage the butterflies to your area if you live in North Queensland, which is the natural territory of this butterfly. The Cairns Birdwing may be seen in the rainforests of North Queensland and in the gardens of surrounding areas.



DID YOU KNOW?

Flying Foxes are vegetarians?

Their basic diet consists of flowers and fruits of native trees including Eucalypts and native figs. Nectar and juice is extracted and pulp and seeds discarded. This process greatly assists with the pollination, germination and distribution of native plant species, which is why Flying Foxes are so valuable in the natural environment.

When native food is in short supply, they will look to commercial crops for their food source.

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NATIVE GRASSES.

Many people would be familiar with the bird attracting powers of such beautiful flowering Australian native plants like Grevilleas and Bottlebrush. But have you thought about the thousands of other Australian native plants that could attract wildlife to our gardens?

Let's not just think of flowers for a minute. What other plants could we grow successfully in our gardens that would attract wildlife? Have you thought about native grasses?

There area many seed eating birds that would relish the opportunity to feast on grass seeds. And some of the grass species such as *Agrostis aemula* - a beautifully coloured but short lived native grass – and the Mitchell grasses, provide food for birds and a beautiful and interesting garden display. The seeds held aloft from the grassy tussocks of many of these plants are favoured by samll finches such as Diamond Firetail *(Emblema guttata)*, Red-browed Firetail *(Emblema temporalis)*, Double-barred finch *(Poephila bichenovii)*, to list a few. The seeds are collected on the ground by these birds. Finches also feed on insects which are attracted to the garden by the cover the grasses provide. Finches also use the grasses for shelter, refuge from larger predatory birds and as nesting materials.

Attracting finches to the garden will inevitably bring in the predatory birds and other wildlife that rely on these smaller birds as food source. So, you can see that by the simple act of planting areas of native grasses your garden can become host to an ever growing array of wildlife.

DID YOU KNOW?

NATIVE BIRDS AND ANIMALS ARE VERY ADAPTABLE TO THEIR EVER CHANGING ENVIRONMENT. MANY INTRODUCED PLANT SPECIES NOW PROVIDE FOOD AND SHELTER.

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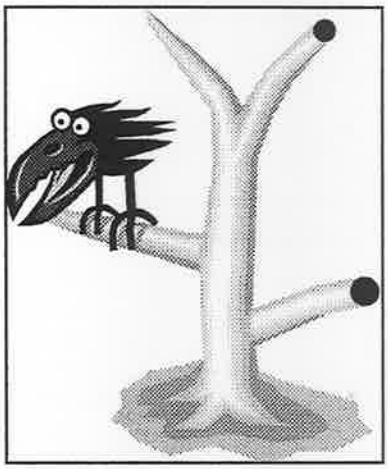
RAINFORESTS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE.

Rainforest once covered more parts of Australia than it does now. Climatic changes and pressure from development have seen these types of forests replaced by eucalypt or acacia communities , or human development. Several types of rainforests exist – Littoral (rainforest growing by the sea) and sub-tropical being the best known in NSW. Trees reach heights of more than 30 metres in the sub-tropical rainforests, heights for tree growth is lessened in littoral rainforests mainly due to the poor soils and salt laden winds. Palms, vines and epiphytes also exist in both rainforests types. Epiphytes include Bird's nest or Crow's nest ferns (*Asplenium nidus*), Staghorn *(Platycerium superbum)* and Elkhorn Ferns, Basket Ferns *(Drynaria)*, orchids including King or Rock Orchid *(Dendrobium speciosum)*, Dagger Orchid *(Dendrobium pugioiforme)* and *Dendrobium mortii*. The forest floor is often covered with a thick cover of leaf litter in various stages of decay, which provides damp, moist conditions for invertebrates and insects. Many rainforest mammals and birds rely on these for food. Production of fruits and berries by rainforest plants also attracts animals such as possums, pademelons, bandicoots, potaroos, antechinus', rats, emus, parrots, doves & pigeons.

Syzygium spp. are rainforest trees that produce colourful fruit, edible to birds and humans, are relatively easy to grow and can be trimmed into a hedge or allowed to grow naturally. The attractive new leaf growth is also a benefit to garden beauty. Riberry and Lilly-pilly being the more commonly known names of these plants. The fruits range in colour from white through to various shades of pink, mauve and red.



DID YOU KNOW?
Epiphytes do no harm to rainforest trees. They simply rely on the tree for physical support and provision of leaf litter. Epiphytes are varied in size & include the lichens, algae, orchids, ferns.
Epiphyte (epi = upon, phyte = plant).