



ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS
RAINFOREST STUDY GROUP

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"Australians must become aware that they continue to be the most environmentally destructive race the world has ever seen. This can only be rectified by education." (Earth Sanctuaries Ltd 1995 Annual Report)

STUDY GROUPS -- LEADERS MEETING AT THE BALLARAT CONFERENCE

Though I was not able to attend Septembers get-together, I did contribute a couple of suggestions in the interests of the wide diversity of those who make up Groups' membership. The good news is that despite much past discussion (mainly about insurance problems in our increasingly litigious society) it was moved "that Study Groups may accept subscribers to their N/L who are not members of the Society" and was carried. This is of great relief to me, as I suspect that many of you are not members of SGAP, though I really do urge everyone to belong. Benefits include receipt of 'Australian Plants' - a superb journal containing much botanical information - while the associated State bulletins also carry great detail and many items of interest to their subscribers.

SGAP members also have the benefits of a much wider membership - it is easier to find people with similar interests locally than it is with a much more thinly and widely spread Group membership.

Specifically for the RFSG. Would those people who lead excursions or meetings please have an attendance book to be signed, to record attendance of members and visitors. That is something that I have tended to overlook, but it is important to ensure that this rule be adhered to.

WHERE IS THE RAINFOREST STUDY GROUP HEADING ? WHAT DIRECTION SHOULD WE TAKE ?

Matters discussed at the leaders meeting included 'Study Group purpose' Again specifically to the RFSG, items in the Minutes listed 'gathering and dissemination of information', 'what Genera need to be studied next', followed by a discussion on 'whether Groups be more selective in their area of study?' This must have referred to our Group?

I have often wondered whether I direct the RFSG as the majority would wish. (Hence all those little survey sheets that have been returned, generally expressing satisfaction with the information disseminated. Thank you for your interest)

Many have joined the Group feeling that there would be a great deal of horticultural items and detail - some have left, I suspect disappointed that this topic was not sufficiently emphasised or that too broad a range of subjects is covered. Others of course joined fully aware of the wide N/L coverage, and are extremely loyal and interested members. This creates somewhat of a quandary to me. Whilst I do grow plants as garden and pot specimens, my overwhelming interest is in the field - the natural environment. That is obviously why we acquired the delightful "Booyong" 4 years ago, and why I sought the leadership of our Group late 1989 to bring it out of an unjustified dormancy.

My other problem is that we are, after all, the **Rainforest Study Group**, and unlike the vast majority of Study Groups do not have any reference to particular plant genera (e.g. Grevillea), families (e.g. Ferns) or specifics (like Food or Container Plants). In fact the only other Groups approaching our coverage are Wallum, Garden Design, Native Plant Regeneration, Wildlife & Plants.

An overriding interest too, in environmental issues initially drew me to the Forests - back in the 70's and 80's when increasing concern at the rapid loss of RF in NSW was being expressed, and the awareness that the rest of the world was losing its rich forest habitats just as fast.

Knowing the founding leader, Graham Quint's outlook, he would have deliberately set up RFSG on a broadly based situation way back in 1981 and I have merely carried on with his philosophy anyway.

Among the alternatives to consider could be - change our name to say, SGAP Conservation & Environment Group; continue on our merry way (which I reckon most people are happy with); continue as we are doing but also **bring in some assistant(?) leaders, each specialising in an individual plant group, genera or family and their horticultural qualities, requirements etc.** These need not be onerous positions, say a page equiv of N/L content, either on a regular or occasional basis, sent to me for copying and distribution with my regular N/L.

You should all think about this, and if you feel strongly one way or another let me know so that I can publish ideas and get some discussion going. And of course if you would like to volunteer taking on a segment of study in which you are particularly interested, do it ASAP.

NEW MEMBERS The Group welcomes the following to our ranks -

PAM OWENS & SUE MUMMERY Doon Doon Rd Midginbil via Uki 2484 SGAP TOOWOOMBA Qld.
PAUL WAGER 4 Sandpiper Dr Glenore Grove 4342

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS

TREVOR & CAROL DEANE have been hosting overseas visitors on a regular basis during their annual leave. Early in 1995 they got to Nth.Q where the the 3 days at the Daintree were very wet; another disappointment was Cairns, which they had not seen for 12 years but now with tourists everywhere. With the road from The Daintree River now sealed almost to Cape Tribulation it is heartbreaking to see the clearing which has occurred in one of nature's wonderlands. The city disease of rubbish thrown from the thousands of vehicles that now travel this once isolated road is terrible to see. Most of us do not readily recognise the massive damage we have done to this jewel of a country in just 200 years but it is so obvious with places like Daintree that we have seen in our own lifetimes, firstly as almost untouched forest and then as country being turned into large suburban blocks. What will this land be by 2100 ?

The small area of RF near Sydney - Campbells Crater in Kuringai Case NP - that is known by many of us who have been involved in its regeneration - is looking very good. An annual follow-up in July was gratifying in that the visible Crofton weed was cleared after just 4 hours work, and over the years of active removal, all other vegetation has multiplied, and some weeds are likely to survive within the thick growth of ferns. It was lovely at the Crater, the birds were in full song and it was wonderful to see a three metre Diamond Python enjoying the very hot "winter" sun.

MIMI GODFREY summarised her 6 week northern coach camping tour during winter saying " While in Darwin visited the Herbarium at Palmerston and was allowed to look through the specimens. Was given a copy of their Vol. 1 of "Flora of the Darwin Area" - very good book, well illustrated with sketches.

Toured from Alice Springs via Gunbarrel Hwy - Gibson Desert to Shark Bay - then up the coast to Exmouth - the Hammerslys - Broome - Winjana - Geike - Halls Creek - Bungle Bungles, and then down the Tanami Track to Alice Springs. Very rewarding but very cold at night (even coolish at Broome). Across the Gibson there were white, yellow and pink everlastings as far as the eye could see, and Nulla Nullas (Ptilotus exaltatus) lining the road and up the hills together with Ashburton Pea (Swainsona), Sennas and Wattles. They had a good season. Am still trying to identify many plants without satisfactory reference material. Our group included 3 who were very interested in plants and 3 keen Birds, so a lot of knowledge was shared around."

ESTHER TAYLOR wrote that the spring flowering around Proston was very colourful, everything looked fresh after some good rain. The many Silky Oaks ensured a golden display everywhere, while the White Cedars attract more than their share of very noisy Black Cockatoos when fruit is ripe. There is bird song all day - so many species are here and not near as shy as the city birds. King Parrots often camp in the Mango tree during the day, but they are eating all the small stone fruits on my young trees.

Have planted out all the plants brought up from Ipswich on my move and are doing well. The soil is a gritty loam - seems not much goodness in it, but it drains well - so am trying to add lots of compost and manure to improve the fertility. (In mid Oct) The Boodoomba Dam is only at 6% capacity and fast drying up, though we are not as bad as the Kingaroy area where there are total water restrictions.

I really enjoy reading the letters from members detailing their activities and describing trips they have made.

MAL CULLEN tells of some recent happenings around Maclean NSW . He has a job supplying plants and revegetating part of a 30 acre island near Lawrence. It is a cane farm, but the owner is a really nice bloke and is going to plant about 5% with RF species, and later will establish a lot of cabinet timber species as well. Sales of RF plants at local markets have been slow because of drought, but he has been buying in things like Grevillea and Kangaroo Paws which are currently popular, requiring less water. Our own gardens are coming on well despite the dry - we have over 120 fruit trees, and hundreds of RF plants thriving on just 3/4 of an acre. Loaned some of my nice tub specimens to Coffs Harbour Group for their flower show, and caught up with Garry Daly and Helen who had called in to see John Ross.

Mal, who runs "Tropical Landscapes" supplying native plants and with a Garden Design & Construction service (Ph 066 453 205) is interested in obtaining rare Palms and Lilly Pillies for the Lawrence job, and a public reserve he is voluntarily regenerating. He will buy plants for the island, but would appreciate donations for the reserve. If anyone is interested in assisting him, please give him a call.

CHRISTOPHER PIDD made the big trip from Perth to attend the SGAP seminar at Ballarat a few months ago where there was a special display by Study Groups, as well as art and crafts features using native plant materials. He was suitably impressed at the number of RF species that were included in the Food Plants Study Group display and listings,

Later, on a winery visit while touring the Barossa Valley he came across some recipes using native plants, mainly of the RF. Explaining his interest as a member of both Groups, the people gave him copies as well as approval for us to use them in a N/L. (Thank you Christopher - I shall include them in future issues, as space permits.)

Yet another great offer from STEVE SINCLAIR, who wrote that he has an interest in sketching plants and animals in pencil. Being a full time student makes it difficult to be too involved with Group activities, but he does wish to contribute and would be happy to sketch subjects to be described in the N/L. He would require a photo of the item to be sent to him to work from, so if any of you have ideas for N/L topics that could be illustrated to advantage, do contact him. (Ed. or me).

Steve has a long break from study and says he would like to cycle around N.E. NSW for a few weeks. If he does make it, I am sure that those of you I refer to him for assistance will be only too happy to oblige. He has not seen any of the forests above Sydney as yet.

BRIAN & LYNETTE TIMMIS are now well settled near the Illawarra RFs and thought we may be interested in one of the local culinary delights. Sent a brochure produced by one of the nations two (only) huge milling groups - Goodman Fielder - promoting their latest bread products - "Bush Breads". Included is a Mountain Pepper (Tasmannia sp), Pumpkin & Poppy seed loaf; Aniseed Myrtle & Linola seed bread with "from the Northern Hinterlands, the finely milled leaves of the Aniseed Myrtle tree are blended with ---". Backhousia anisata is an extremely rare species, no wonder the leaves are 'finely milled' and one would have to bet that there would be a mere spoonful sparingly allocated to a whole weeks bake! Lynette didn't say whether she had tried any of the products, nor if they had proved to be popular in the area.

A newish member - COLLEEN KEENA - wrote that one of the strengths of study groups is the opportunity to meet up others with similar interests who live nearby. This was after a visit made to Oliver Carters Toowoomba nursery. She also took the opportunity to read all our past N/Ls while recovering from an operation. (We all trust that recovery is now complete.)

ALONG SOME RAINFOREST TRACKS WITH JEREMY AND SUE

The TRAHAIRS - J. & S. plus their young daughters Joanna & Katie called here in July and say "we had a nice couple of days at Werrikimbie after we left 'Booyong'. Most of the Eucalypt areas had been burnt in what must have been a large fire (National Parks think it was started by the Forestry Commission). We spent a couple of days in the Banda Banda area; one afternoon spent walking up the track to the top of Mt Banda Banda, a beautiful walk with impressive views to the south, courtesy of whoever had cleared the trees on the top (a bit of a pity really); another afternoon walking down the Toorumbie trail - magnificent RF that everyone should see. We were surprised to find the trail recently cleared and graded, it has been impassable for at least 7 years. We hope that logging is not planned for the area (they would not admit to it) - it would be a great shame. We also took the Spokes trail (4wd) from Brushy Mtn to Kookaburra. The trip is only 20 km and easy driving, only 2 sections required concentration. At Kookaburra we enjoyed the short walk along Stockyard Ck to the lookout though the RF here has been affected by heavy logging in the past. On the way back we passed the road to Flat Top and Double Head Mtns where the RF is supposed to be good, we'll have a look next time.

We did stop to walk to Kemps Pinnacle, quite difficult through the regrowth after the fire and it took us an hour to find the Pinnacle. I continued alone to the top which was a bit scary - there was a rope for the last and steepest section, and when I finally reached the top I clung fiercely to the rock as the wind blew about me while an eagle screeched above. It was worth the effort though."

In September the family spent 3 weeks in Qld. "We drove a total of 5,000km and got as far north as Byfield (a mornings drive north of Yeppoon/Rockhampton). We visited the state forests in the area and found they were almost exclusively exotic pine plantations. There were a few camping areas, all with good facilities and excellent swimming holes. One short walk followed a creek and had nice remnant RF, I recall plenty of Byfield ferns, a few Foambark trees and large Pepper vines. In the drier areas there were beautiful Hibiscus mainly yellow or deep pink flowers, but at one place there was a massed display of hybrids with all the colours in between. The Forestry told us that this was a natural plant community. We were very impressed as we thought it had been planted! On the road edges, Grevillea banksii was abundant, mainly red but occasionally white, and rarely pink. We also spotted G. venusta in flower which was a bit exciting.

We spent a few days on Blackdown Tableland and on the whole were somewhat disappointed. We saw very few plants in flower (mid spring), presumably because of the drought. We did spot a Grevillea longistyla in flower as well as many Dendrobium speciosum var capricornicum and a few saprophytic orchids too. We were disappointed to read the proud words of Fitzroy council - since the mid 60's over 4 million hectares of 'unproductive' Brigalow scrub had been removed for beef and wheat. The locals claimed that the district had been in drought for 15 years. What a waste! It was also a shame that no logging had been carried out on Blackdown prior to 1973, in my books another piece of Bjelk bastardy. Logging has stopped at the moment as the species being cut were found only on the Tableland.

We also visited Goomburra SF (near Main Range NP) and Cania Gorge, both places were very dry as was all we saw in Qld except for around Gympie."

" Recently I spent a weekend at Barrington Tops (Allyn river area) NSW with workmates to follow the ridge line from Burruga swamp to Mt Gunamma and onwards towards the plateau. The first day, along an old logging track we had a close encounter with a Tiger snake curled up on the track. There was plenty of Hymenosporum flavum in flower and also a few Cuttsia. The next day we had to turn back with the plateau in sight, but just a bit too far away. The weather was great though, and we were rewarded with many outstanding sights and views of the wilderness. I picked up the shell of a land snail with a reverse thread. Is this rare? We walked a total of 17.5 hours over the 2 days, somewhat tiring."

THE 1995 YEAR HERE AT "BOOYONG" WAS RATHER UNIQUE

Well, of the four we have been here anyway. We had 64" of rain, which was a lot more than in the previous 2 years combined - despite little more than an inch during winter. Suppose a day last Jan made up for that with an over 10" downpour. Cost us heaps of time to repair a breached dam, too. That one fall caused all the then totally leafless Booyongs, Argyrodendron actinophyllum (which we thought had died) to rejuvenate in just 6 days!

The biggest frost we have seen in our lifetime occurred in July and played merry hell with some plants. Lost many planted RF specimens that were well established in the ground - around 2m high - and even big trees and shrubs in the forest were hit hard, especially the Stingers. You'd reckon the Lantana in exposed locations were killed too, but most weren't

We've not seen so many species flower and/or fruit as in the past few months - as mentioned earlier the first time in 4 years that the Cupaniopsis parvifolia have set seed, and there is even fruits on the Python Trees Austromyrtus bidwillii as well.

Late Dec saw a dreadful, though thankfully short, storm with an apparently narrow wind gust very destructive in this immediate area. Neighbours had huge, old gums blown over; here it was mainly big branches torn off and dropped metres away. Mainly Eucs again, but RF was damaged, and some destroyed. Particularly sad to lose some big Shatterwoods (Backhousia sciadophora). Don't know what other devastation may have been caused as we've not checked all the forest yet.

The birds have taken great advantage of an excellent season though. Our house Blue Wrens nested 3 times in quick succession, each time successfully. A friendly Lewin Honeyeater nested in a creeper on a verandah (just head high) and reared one of the twin babies.

Of course the frogs have rarely been happier, we can even hear their friendly chuckles often during the day, as well as a constant night-time rejoicing. And as I sit here seeking inspiration on what to write, the numerous cicadas never cease shouting encouragement.

Among a steady stream of visitors, David Thomas found me a couple more species, most thrilling though he also corrected a couple of misidentifications, so I 'lost' one also. Van Klaphake spent time here on a couple of occasions and identified swags of sedges, grasses, herbs and bigger plants. This is really appreciated because we do want to eventually identify every species here - plant, insect and animal. One day it is our dream to set up an 'Environmental Awareness Centre' to assist in educating those who are willing to learn, as a modest income earner, and in gratitude for a so far fortunate life in this world.

An exciting sighting was of a Spotted-tailed Quoll Dasyurus maculatus, one of the many animals classified as 'vulnerable and rare'. I had a great view of the Quoll, which could have been the actual model for the photo in "Australian Mammals". After mentioning the sighting to an interested near neighbour, he informed us that one had been slaughtered on the 'local killing fields' - the road - a few months previously. Then again, we all demand sealed roads and insist on going to fast for anyone's good.

To conclude. It is with great pride that 'Booyong' will soon be officially classified as a "Wildlife Refuge" barring any unforeseen circumstances, and will be recognised by the NSW govt. as such by proclamation in its 'Gazette'. The property was recently inspected by the NP&WS who confirmed our opinion that there is a wide diversity of habitats here and that it is an important link with surrounding areas of relatively undisturbed vegetation.

FROST DAMAGE TO RAINFOREST TREES IN AN EXPOSED AREA [AT IPSWICH QLD.]

Robert Bos reports his recent experience. "In Oct. 1994 78 RF trees were planted in an area approx. 60m x 15m at Bundamba. These were purchased from Rainforest World, Morayfield, and were on average about 50cm tall in 15cm pots. Twenty-nine species were represented with 1 to 5 trees of each being planted. The site is in a slight hollow, ensuring that some water and nutrients are provided through natural run-off, but is exposed to the N.W. and hence to westerly winds in winter. Apart from some shading from tall gums to the east for an hour or so in the morning, the site is in direct sunlight for much of the day. Frosts are relatively common in winter.

The soil is clay and very hard, except for brief periods after times of prolonged rain, which are rare. A bobcat with a large auger was used to drill holes, squared off with a crowbar and a couple of handfuls of gypsum & dynamic lifter were placed beneath the trees and on the surface of the soil during planting. The trees were hand watered, initially every second day, then weekly. They were mulched with recycled paper from the house and office, as well as cardboard [flattened cartons] hauled by the trailer load from the local greengrocers. This was weighed down with sticks and grass clippings. [In hindsight, the extra investment of woodchip would have been worthwhile.] Additional fertiliser -dynamic lifter - was applied in Jan., April, & Sept. 1995.

The 1995 winter was a mild one with few frosts until the night of 7 August, which was one of the coldest on record with -5 C° recorded at Amberley; probably similar at Bundamba.

During the first 12 months, the following observations were made:

1. Species which did not survive the summer heat and wind

Harpullia pendula [Tulip Wood]. Macadamia tetraphylla [Macadamia]. Pittosporum undulatum [Sweet Pittosporum]. Sarcopterix stipata [Steelwood].

2. Species which were killed by frost

Buckinghamia celsissima [Ivory Curl] - some. Diploglottis cunninghamii = D. australis [Native Tamarind] - one. Eleocarpus grandis [Blue Quandong] - all except the tallest. Flacourtia sp. [Cape Plum]. Syzygium fibrosum [Fibrous Satinash].

3. Species with substantial frost damage, but which recovered.

Albizia retusa. Buckinghamia celsissima. Diploglottis cunninghamii. Elaeocarpus grandis. Euodia elleryana = melicope elleryana [Pink Evodia] Macaranga tanarius [Macaranga]. Xanthostemon chrysanthus [Golden Penda]. [Celery Wood]. Stenocarpus sinuatus [Wheel of Fire].

5. Species with no damage

Castanospermum australe [Black Bean]. Commersonia bartramia [Brown Kurrajong]. Cupaniopsis anarციoides [Tuckeroo]. Ficus watkinsiana [Nipple Fig]. Flindersia australis [Crow's Ash]. Hymenosporum flavum [Native Frangipani]. Jagera pseudorhus [Foambark]. Lepiderema pulchella [Fine-leaved Tuckeroo]. Rhodamnia rubescens [Brown Malletwood]. Rhodospaera rhodanthema [Yellow Wood]. Syzygium leuhmannii [Small-leaved Lilly-pilly]. Backhousia citriodora [Lemon-scented Myrtle].

6. Most vigorous species [around 2 metres after 12 months]

Brachychiton acerifolius. Castanospermum australe. Elaeocarpus grandis [the surviving one]. Hymenosporum flavum. Polyscias elegans. Rhodospaera rhodanthema.

59 trees survived the first year, including 2 self-sown Grevillea robusta [Silky Oak], probably offspring of the tree in the greengrocer's yard!

Planting hardy trees with dense foliage [e.g. Acacias, Callistemons] to the north and west, a year or two before commencing plantings would probably have reduced losses.

[Ed.] Thank you for that Rob. It was a really great report and pretty well confirms my own experience - both in species that don't like the intense cold, and that prior preparation by planting 'nurse' or shelter species could make a huge difference in RF establishment.

FROST ALSO AFFECTED A DURAL [SYDNEY] GARDEN

Leon Radunz sent this report on his recent unhappy experience. [Dural is an outer suburb, situated just like Ipswich - about the same distance inland of the 'Big Smoke' and on the coastal plain; so they both enjoy similarly extreme climatic conditions.] "We have been at Dural for just 3 years, but this winter was far more damaging than those previous. While the temperature range might not indicate a particularly 'cold' year, we had a continuous sequence of heavy frosts for 3 weeks. They killed the Peanut Tree and some Harpullias as well as severely burning the Blue Quandongs up to their height of 5 m. They are only now [mid Oct.] starting to send out some new growth from the bare trunks, soon after the burnt leaves fell off.

Last January we had a 43° day, and that dropped most of the leaves of several Pink Euodias. They are sprouting new growth but have that 'open' appearance. Even many of the Eugenias suffered burnt leaf tips. The Flame trees suffered in their own peculiar way. The sides of their trunks facing the western sun were burnt so badly that the bark cracked but is now slowly scarring over.

For good news, the Red Cedars, Candlenuts and White Beech are growing very quickly."

RAINFOREST SPECIES CAN BE VERY FORGIVING OF POOR CONDITIONS

Jan Sked makes these comments on the situation at Brisbane. (late Sept.) "We are still experiencing drought conditions. The clouds blow up every day and look promising, but nothing comes of it. It is hard to keep everything alive and the plants in pots are very touchy. I have been holding many of these for about 2 years waiting on my son, Russell, to have his garden ready for planting. Haven't lost any of the RF plants yet, but the Callistemons and Melaleucas keep dying on me; they are much harder to hold for long periods.

Russell has a lovely empty yard, just waiting for us to begin planting. The only plant he has is a very large old Coral Tree, which is heritage listed and may not be removed. Although his block is near the river, it has the most atrocious soil. Almost pure clay, very little drainage. The casuarinas, melaleuca and callistemons should be OK and the eucs. have been selected for that type of soil. I have also found that RF plants are very forgiving of clay; so I think they will be alright too. Once the plants become established, they should provide an extension of habitat for the wildlife from the river."

NEW LAWS PROTECTING QLD FLORA RECENTLY ENACTED

Jan also said "We have new nature conservation legislation put in force here in Qld. recently - the Nature Conservation Act 1992 and the Nature Conservation Regulation 1994 - which makes it a requirement to hold an appropriate license or permit to take, move or sell

protected indigenous native flora for either personal or commercial purposes. This legislation applies to both public and private land. So far there is a lot of confusion over it. I am in the throes of trying to obtain the necessary scientific permit to collect botanical specimens for identification purposes, but am getting nowhere fast."

(Ed. I am amazed Jan. Next, you will be telling us that Goss will do something about protecting some of the States habitat which I note, somewhat bitterly, is being cleared at the rate of a half million ha. p.a.)

THOUGH IN NSW OUR LAND CLEARING POLICY WAS VERY QUICKLY WEAKENED

As commented in our last N/L, the howls of anguish from the rural community on the decision to control sensitive, rare and diminishing habitats continued, bringing so much pressure on the govt. that it caved in and exempted certain areas, as well as removing any decision making authority from the logical determinant - the Nat Parks & Wildlife Service. It is amazing that so much influence on our present decision-makers comes from those who actively campaign against them, criticise them at every opportunity and who never ever seem to come across with constructive ideas on how the state could be administered in a better manner. The opposition to a responsible policy on our remnant bushland and other still useful habitat areas has been led by the Rural Newspaper groups influential, and in my opinion generally conservative, sometimes misinformative and often dogmatic paper, 'The Land'. Anyway, enough of an individuals lament - it is the wildlife and other aspects of nature that will continue to suffer from our activities; we sadly seem to know no limits to the greed that many of us demand.

THE 'GROWTH' ELEMENT OF OUR ECONOMIC SYSTEM HAS TO CEASE ... SOON

An item in the **Big Scrub** N/L of Spring 95 stood out like a beacon. Under the heading "Let Business Do The Thinking For You", the statement 'growing planetary awareness of mass degradation has forced the international business community to accommodate green strategies in their planning. Their main response has been to reassure us that business and the environment are compatible. However, Capitalism is structurally dependant on relentless economic growth, which is incompatible with the finite biosphere. The Growth Junkies have realised they can't feed the momentum of their insatiable machines on the dwindling resources we have left. So they've decided to pretend this situation doesn't exist."

Some quotations from a book, a product of a right wing think-tank, 'A Moment On Earth' bears out this finding. The premise of the book is that Greenies are doom-mongers, and if they would simply chill out and pretend everything was cool everything would be cool.

A particular aspect of our industrial economy that is of concern to many people is the fast-increasing rate of gold mining in remote or fairly undisturbed areas of forested, often rugged and inhospitable terrain, or in places where maximum environmental consequences are likely. The classic current controversies are BHP with its Ok Tedi mine and Placer Gold at Porgera, both associated with devastation to jungle, riverine, river, estuarine and ocean habitat that will not only substantially reduce fish and other food resources over the long term, but also cost the local, national and world economy vast financial losses. Those particular operations are also building up resentment in the local population, and it would not surprise if an outcome similar to CRA's Bouganville mine eventuates - death, property and environmental destruction and violent divisiveness within the population. But, there is a sequel coming up.

This is the Lihir Island goldmining project, also in New Guinea. Their prospectus for raising some of the massive finance needed to destroy much of the RF-clad island and to pollute the presently productive onshore and ocean fisheries, contains some very worrying facts. (Company prospectuses these days by law must contain even the minutest details of a proposal to avoid being 'misleading'.) The intention is to mine and treat - with cyanide - an average of approx 7 million tonnes of ore p.a. which will then be dumped into the adjacent sea together with, for the first few years at least, an average of 34 million tonnes p.a. of waste material.

Anyone for cyanide/sulphur/sundry heavy metals & chemical laced seafood for dinner tonight?

Next, we have the nearby, in Irian Jaya, Freeport goldmining effort where RF clearing and degrading is occurring, as well as occupying soldiers killing local landholder 'troublemakers'.

Closer to home, near Parkes NSW we had the recent deaths of many native birds [2,000 were admitted to - the bodies that were actually found. How many more were not?] who foolishly used the cyanide tailings dam for food and shelter. The company Norths, of famed Tasmanian woodchip notoriety accepted the blame, apologised, then announced they would seek approval for a similar, but much larger operation at the nearby Lake Cowall which happens to be a major wetland and bird sanctuary.

I often wonder whether the high environmental costs, massive use of fossil fuels and associated Greenhouse problems is worth getting that expensive, beautiful but useless [for sustenance or survival] mineral out of the ground - to use lots more energy to turn it into ingots and then to merely bury it once again, either in underground bank vaults or just in peoples back yards. Surely rainforests, wetlands and oceans are more important for our welfare and survival?

A POSITIVE MOVE MAKES LOCAL COUNCILS REPORT ANNUALLY ON THE STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

I do not know whether this requirement is a NSW initiative, or if we are merely catching up with other States. Our council published its first draft report late last year, and it seems to be a very comprehensive document of 189 pages and appendices - maps, charts, tables, etc of an equiv size. Coverage includes physical, social and economic environments; descriptions of and pressures affecting land and water; and other matters that affect us all.

Forestry gets a fair coverage, as does mining, biodiversity, vegetation cover and almost whatever else you can think of. If these documents are given the importance that they should receive, even just a small minority of concerned residents will have a major impact on local quality of life issues. Whoever were involved with this legislation should be highly commended for their foresight.

OVERSEAS, SURINAME IS BROKE AND MAY BE REPOSSESSED BY THE LOGGERS

Yes, I had to look it up too. It's in South America and has one of the largest expanses of unspoilt RF anywhere. If they flog it off, concessions over 2.8 million acres will be granted, priced at a mere 10% of what other nations are getting for their rights. As in Borneo, the homelands of 3 native tribes would be destroyed to say nothing of massive habitat loss for our fellow creatures. Three giant Asian timber companies are attempting to gain control, though as always, environmentalists are mounting opposition. Other objections are based on the loss of potential drugs that "could be worth a fortune" to a couple of big pharmaceutical groups.

SOME ITEMS OF INTEREST FROM OTHER PUBLICATIONS

TREE PROTECTORS - CHEAP AND EFFICIENT.

From "WANATCA's" quarterly "Quandong" Vol 21/3 'Bob Boehm has come up with a simple and cheap way of making tree protectors from readily available or by-product materials. He cuts the bottom off a fertiliser bag or similar, then cuts a length from a roll of chicken wire using its natural curl to hold the bag tight... A couple of wooden stakes at either side of the wire, and he has a tough protector which forms a favoured microclimate round his trees'

GROWING MACADAMIAS.

The WANATCA 1995 Yearbook has a comprehensive write-up on High Density Planting of Macadamia Nuts by Julie Lake from "Australian Horticulture" describing techniques developed by Qld. plant breeders, the Bells, who are "growing macadamias like wheat". They have a plantation at Beerwah with 10,000 trees, processing their own nuts and breeding new varieties noted for high yields and suitability to Oz conditions. Their revolutionary method is aiming for production per ha, instead of the usual "per tree". Under traditional methods, at 5 years of age Macadamias may produce about 2kg of nuts per tree; the standard 200 trees per ha yields 400kg/ha, but the Bell's new high density methods and better yielding trees has the potential to produce 1 1/2 tonnes of nuts in shell within 3 years of planting. In the 4th year results from their trials were 3 1/2 tonnes/ha.

They have been experimenting with an alternative density of 2000 trees/ha which would bring full production to about the 6th year. High density plantings can create a closed canopy with problems of fungal disease and harvesting difficulties. New management techniques have to be evolved, such as cutting back trees to knee height in alternative rows once full production has been achieved. This process continues over the life of the orchard on a 4 - 6 year cycle.

The article continues with many more interesting and novel points on the production of Macadamia nuts, and on the face of it, seems pretty sensible. After all, this is the way we have been farming our grasses such as wheat, rice oats etc for millennia, and recently our timber needs, meat vegetables and whatever. One cannot pillage the resources of the wild indefinitely. Each one must eventually run out - the greater the population, the faster they go.

"NOTES FROM THE AUST. FLORA FOUNDATION".

The Sept 95 QLD. BULLETIN mentions a grant was made for research on 'Fire & the Aust. Flora' over several studies including "A RF can be a natural fire break, but fires can influence how quickly RF species establish in adjacent eucalypt forest. The foundation will fund part of a large project on the boundaries of Rfs. Drs. Julian Ash and Brendan Mackey at the A.N.U. are the researchers"..... and "Tree ferns in Plantations - seeing that 80% of the Dicksonia ferns bought by Australians originate from uncontrolled harvest from native forests in Tas. [or so it has been estimated]. The AFF and a company which has an export license for salvaged Dicksonia are funding a project aimed at cultivation of Dicksonia as an understorey of plantation forests."

That issue also contained a letter from a nth. Qld. member critical of a report made by a RFSG stalwart published in our own N/L, which was subsequently reprinted in an earlier BULLETIN. The criticism was both unwarranted and unjustified so I made the necessary reply on behalf of the Group. It is good that such matters are given due publicity, for it gives an opportunity to clear up any apprehension.

"THE CRY OF THE WILDERNESS".

VICTORIA'S N/L of Sept 95 recounts its editor's concern at the destruction he encountered during an Easter Forest Camp organised by the Conservation Council of Vic. This allowed the opportunity to see at first hand, forest coupes currently being logged as well as to look over the RFs of the Errinundra Plateau. Bob said - "I was to learn just what can be meant by the term timber extraction under current logging practices. --- where the last puffs of smoke curled from the burn at the end of the logging operation. It was total devastation and I was shocked at what I saw. An area of probably 40 ha had been totally felled, apart from a few scattered trees that I am informed are required to be left standing. --- Trees of all sizes from saplings to old forest giants lay strewn across the charred and churned up forest floor, clearly not to be used commercially. I could only guess that perhaps 10 - 15 % of the felled timber was actually utilised. This area had been prime old growth forest with a mixed age vegetatiuon that provided homes and food to a richly varied community of wild life."

"The cost benefit of the whole operation also must come into question. By the time planning for a logging coupe is completed, roads installed, then perhaps a century's wait and management before another stick of timber is extracted from that area. I question whether the rock-bottom woodchip prices being currently paid would even meet the costs"

"THE CASE OF THE FARCICAL FOREST RESERVES."

The BIG SCRUB NEWSLETTER, Spring 95 raises " this highly controversial issue and is critical of the Federal Govt's. proposals for National Forest Conservation Reserves. The indications are that despite an attempt to ensure the Green vote remains (?) with the Labour Party, key conservation groups are somewhat unhappy with that policy and are considering withdrawing their support at the next election.

The article states that in determining the DFA [deferred Forest Areas], values such as biodiversity, National Estate and World Heritage potential were not realistically considered. It seems that State Forests want access to 1,900 forest areas next year, many of them vital for inclusion in the promised reserve system.

ENVIRONMENTAL WEEDS.

SGAP's CANBERRA JOURNAL of Sept. includes an overview of Environmental Weeds, specifically relating to the ACT. Though exotics are obviously the major concern, some Oz. natives are not spared either - concern is directed at such species as Acacia baileyana [Cootamundra Wattle], A. decurrens [Green Wattle], Grevillea rosmarinifolia, G. juniperina, that have 'got away'. In addition, there are fears that plants introduced from other regions will swamp local [endemic] populations and so compromise any distinctive gene pool that may be unique in the Territory.

The Journal also explains that a DESERT FLORA AND FAUNA PARK is to be set up at Alice Springs, at the base of the MacDonnell Ranges on the western outskirts of Alice. It is proposed that there be 6 different habitats which will feature a wide range of plants and animals. Each will comprise an extensive display area in which a series of structures will house and present a fascinating variety of native animals and natural history displays typical of that habitat. Should be well worth a visit once it has become established.

MANY OF THE NSW FOREST DEBATES are mentioned in NEFA's August N/L. The most positive happenings are the two great RF new NP's of Tooloom and Toonambah in the very NE of NSW, on the Richmond and the Border Ranges. (Ed. I am seeking further details on these from our NP&WS). (We looked at these forests a few years ago and were impressed with the habitat values and the good condition of the vegetaion in both places. Our observations though were made only along the road, plus looking at some picnic areas and RF reserves.)

Among points of criticism. # The Forest Conservation Strategy, has failed to identify the distribution of most large areas of RF in their assessments. # They express concern at the present vogue of 'patch clearfelling' of native forest where so called 'canopy gaps' of up to 3ha in area are created. # Claims are made that clearfelling of known Koala habitats is happening regularly. # The misleading of an incoming minister by the NSW police also gets a mention. It seems they briefed him that environmental groups caused great economic damage to logging machinery over some years, despite nobody being having been arrested, charged, or convicted.

NEFA is doing a great job in trying to protect as much of our remaining forest as they possibly can, and they publish an informative, concerned N/L each quarter. They also require more funds as well as willing members. Those of you who may be interested in becoming members can obtain further info from me or c/- Big Scrub Environment Centre 149 keen st Lismore 2480.

THERE IS A NEW THREAT LOOMING TO "THE NATIONAL ESTATE" AND ITS PROTECTION

I am not sure of the specific listing involved, but a powerful mining company, Mt. Isa Mines Ltd, has challenged the declaration of a site by the Heritage Commission. If the courts allow this case to be heard and the litigant wins the case, it seems that very many existing sites, and future listings on the 'Register' will also be challenged. If this does occur, it seems that our National Estate will be decided not by scientists, ecologists or historians, but by the legal profession in the pay of big miners, loggers, land sharks and any other exploiter with a quid in his pocket. This emerging problem surely would be worthy of a referendum question to constitutionally guarantee permanent protection ?

IT SEEMS THAT TREE FARMING (PLANTATIONS) IS SET FOR A REAL BOOM

Work being carried out by a Brisbane high-tech company is resulting in the creation of a race of super trees. So far the technology has been used on tropical pines, Radiata, tropical Eucs, and Blue Gums. RF species are yet to come. DNA fingerprinting allows strains for rapid growth, straightness, branch pattern, lack of knots, resistance to pests, and other 'economic' traits. In one family, a single genetic marker has yielded a 70% increase in volume in a mere 5.5 years compared to normal plants.

Demand is almost insatiable, with almost 8 billion seedlings a year required, and set to soar as native forests are exhausted. In Asia alone, within a few years a market for 1.1 billion Acacia seedlings p.a. is expected. World wide, large plantations are being established to head off a looming timber shortage.

And the best thing about this whole mass production system is that it needs virtually no workers to be employed. A robotic set-up, tended by just one person can produce 10 million seedlings a year in a tiny 250sq m area. Yes, once again it is genetic engineering at its very best.

THE SUREST WAY TO STOP A WORLD HERITAGE LISTING IS COTTON GROWING

There has been a lot of support for the Lake Eyre region in our very arid inland to be listed because of its unique qualities, also because it seemed to have little 'economic' value for minerals or agriculture. It would be seen as a Government actually doing something to show its credibility in environmental awareness and concern by protecting a vast area; but with no cost whatsoever to a 'growth' and 'development' mania which like it or not, we will have to bear at whatever cost to our, and our childrens future.

However the proposal has been impeded because it has been discovered that this is one of an extraordinary few water sources in Oz that has not been exploited and is just going to waste! This is the famous Coopers Creek, immortalised in our folk lore. It seems a NSW group already doing their bit for (to?) my State wish to help 'develop' the Channel Country'. They have so far acquired a 22,000 ha property at Windorah and seek the right to remove 1.5% of the average flow of the Cooper. Initially.

At present they have 2 pumping licenses that went with 'Currareva' station but if they gain an increase, it is claimed they will use 14 huge pumps and remove 2,000 million litres of water each day. That seems like almost 500,000,000 gallons - a hell of a lot more than every Oz city combined, uses daily. (This quantity is needed to store water on farm, as the Cooper flows only intermittently so they want to get it when they can). Imagine the evaporation. Cotton needs regular chmical applications, and those blokes don't use it like you and I - it is aerial sprayed. They claim spraying will only happen when the wind is blowing away from the creek. No mention of it draining back every time it rains, of course.

There is a lot of opposition, and from the pastoral sector as well as conservationists. Lake Eyre and all those other ephemeral reservoirs will be degraded by a diminished water supply, and contaminated by poisons if this project is allowed. It has also been clearly stated that if it is approved by the Qld. govt., an almost certain application to the world body for Heritage Listing will be immediately aborted. Over to you, Mr. Goss; or maybe your successor after the Townsville by-election ?

YES. A COUPLE OF ELECTIONS WILL BE OVER BEFORE OUR NEXT N/L

As you all know, the fate of the present Qld administration hinges on the Mundingburra outcome next month, and soon after the Federal govt is up for grabs. Later in the year it will be Tas & Vic's turn. We surely live in exciting times ! In every case we will be voting for either Bib or Bub, some claim. How is it that those seeking our favours seem to be all clones - well dressed, clean cut blokes with a law degree, or sometimes sheilas, ditto though with well coiffeured heads? All with identical policies of course, except where they disagree on an odd point, but then the successful mob says slips, we didn't mean that one and soon reverse the promise. Remember the Commonwealth Bank?

However the big thing these days are Green policies, or lack of them. The major parties are chasing preferences from a cynical electorate, so it can be guaranteed that there will be much discussion on the environment. Seems a case of getting priorities right at long last. Another topic that is bound to attract much discussion, thanks to one G. Campbell, is the country's population capacity and policies appropriate to the level of our basic resources and financial situation.

Don't take it too badly if your side loses - little will change whoever is there.

NAURU IS NOT A GOOD EXAMPLE ON HOW TO TREAT A RAINFOREST

Phosphate mining commenced in 1906, and the mineral will run out in a couple of years. The Island has been almost totally stripped of its once dense forest, to leave a 'desert of jagged coral pinnacles, uninhabitable, unusuable, a ghostly array of tombstones'. A clean-up will soon be attempted - an estimated \$230 million dollars over 23 years is the cost. They can't even produce their own food now.

"DECLARED" WILDERNESS -- AN ALTERNATIVE POINT OF VIEW

The NSW government has raised a lot of discussion, argument and controversy with its announced intention of declaring a number of areas in that State to have wilderness protection. [You may recall that the previous administration made an almost identical decision but changed its mind almost immediately]. I praised Carr's decision, in our last N/L but John Wenk of Port Macquarie takes me to task by writing -

"You make reference - nay actually call it Wilderness National Park [Werrikimbie]. It's not wilderness NP, at least not yet, and I hope for heaven's & conservation's sake it never becomes that. Nor Barrington Tops NP or any other one. Should that wilderness idea catch on you can kiss goodbye to any support for conservation from the public at large. The majority of private visitors, as opposed to organised tours are people our age, or older. On at least a dozen visits to Werrikimbie and nearby areas we've only twice met young fit people, and one group I had to take to court for misdemeanours. Oldies are what you run into constantly; in a wilderness area they will all be shut out because they'll be required to enter on foot - that means it's a no-go area for them. Now think about it, David. Don't be misled or allow yourself to be misinformed, a phrase you often use.

If people can't get there, they won't see its splendour and rich diversity so won't understand its value for preservation. They will feel, quite rightly, it is not theirs. They are excluded from it and therefore won't give a damn for it. The oldies have the time, as well as money to travel to all these wonderful places; when they get there they are mostly overwhelmed by it and acquire a real strong urge to save them. Shut them out and you lose their support - 100% guaranteed. People do not care for what is not theirs. Be honest David, would you be concerned if Packer lost his fortune tomorrow? Would you, if you lost yours? Nobody can love what he doesn't know and nobody bothers to protect what he doesn't love.

Support N. P.'s but avoid doing so for Wilderness for that is misguided. Our Parks can be cared for and maintained in many better ways than shutting people out of them. Parks without visitors will die; with them they may become injured, but that can be prevented by good management. Take this riddle as an example - Why are cows and pigs not extinct, while so many other animals are? Because cows and pigs are useful to man."

Footnote. The NSW NP&WS Director General denied that the NSW Govt. is trying to close off large areas of the State as wilderness. The reality is that only about 4% of NSW would meet the criteria for wilderness and that only 0.8% of the State has so far been declared. All current proposals represent only an additional 1%.

WERRIKIMBIE NATIONAL PARK -- HOW MUCH RAINFOREST DOES IT HAVE ?

John also disagrees with my statement in the last N/L that Werrikimbie was Australia's first great RF National Park, saying "A great NP yes. Rainforest - no way! The best, and truly RF patch is Banda Banda - well outside the NP. So that leaves you with tiny Plateau Beech within the Park with the Beech so predominant that only Coachwood and undergrowth shares the gully. There is also 'Cobcrofts', all of which you can see in 10 minutes. What makes W. N.P so special is the varied vegetation. From Eucalyptus forests [well and truly harvested in years gone by] to large grassed plains [Mooraback - grazed for generations], to heaths spectacularly covered in wildflowers, stands of Grevilleas, of Mints, Blackboys - you name it, it's there. Even alpine type vegetation; after all there is snow there often enough. But RF? You're kidding. You should have a look-see yourself one day but don't get stuck in Racecourse Swamp - another non-RF environment!"

A DIFFERING VIEW OF A WERRIKIMBIE WILDERNESS AREA.

Frith Peters, a local friend of the RFSG sent this submission supporting the nomination. "I wish to have my concerns in regard to this declaration taken into account.

[1] The fact that less than 1% of NSW (0.8%) is Wilderness Area demonstrates that this finite, ever increasingly valuable resource is too small for (a) the diversity of our plant, animal, landscape and heritage conservation. (b) too small for our ever increasing human population. **Therefore, declaration of Werrikimbie Wilderness Area is essential to our cultural and physical well being.**

[2] Because there are areas of the proposed Wilderness Area that have been historically involved with human endeavour (i.e. the Bicentennial National Trail) and therefore part of white Australian culture, a compromise should be sought to allow this Trail to exist (perhaps in an altered route, or as an easement) despite this being a contradiction to the terms of a Wilderness Area.

[3] I wish to emphasise the fact that vehicular access is totally adequate for this Wilderness Area (i.e. Mooraback Camping Area, Youdales Hut, Brushy Mountain Picnic Area, Cobcrofts, Plateau Beech) for people genuinely interested in enjoying the Australian bush. From these areas the Wilderness can be readily explored and enjoyed for the true clean habitat that it is.. Those arguing for more open use should be made aware of the already numerous 4wd venues available (i.e. many heaches, Forestry roads and tracks, leasehold, and private property) - in other words the majority of NSW land.

I wish to voice these concerns, and the concerns of a large percentage of thinking Australians who quietly "need" the knowledge that wilderness areas are "there."

[4] If, and no doubt there will be objections to this proposal, then rather than lose this asset (a) compromises must be sought and (b) sacrifices must be made in order that that tiny percentage of unscarred Australia be protected from ourselves for ourselves and our children's children so that they will not be astounded by their forefathers' short sighted selfishness".

LATEST NEWS ON THE RARE WOLLEMI PINE

A package of measures to protect the colony from unscrupulous operators includes gaol sentences for people caught stealing seeds. Application has been made to trademark the name "Wollemi Pine" and to protect it under PVR.

MORE PLANTS OF RALPH WOODFORDS ELAEOCARPUS DISCOVERY HAVE BEEN FOUND

Seven trees and a number of seedlings were recently found nearby at Whian Whian SF by our member Nan Nicholson, who by a stroke of luck happened to be checking on a section of that forest about to be logged. In yet another example of professional incompetence, an Environmental Impact Study had been carried out and nothing out of the ordinary noted. Wonder who did the survey and whether he is getting plenty of work. It is just fine to protect known rarities like the Pine, but it is to our shame that little concern is shown to places to be degraded, when it could be against someone's economic interests to do a thorough and competent assessment.

'THE ENVIRONMENT PAGE

The proposed **Dunbogan Canal Development** on the NSW coast has been rejected after a third Commission of Enquiry and so prevents the loss of important wetlands/LRF habitat. Naturally the developer has called foul and has vowed to fight on, saying that he has spent 23 years and millions of dollars to date.

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Illegal land clearing is now being treated with the seriousness it deserves. A Qld company was recently fined \$100,000 for clearing 1000ha in western NSW without approval. An estimated 135,000 trees were destroyed and the criminals involved have to take rehabilitation measures. A disappointment was that the company and its principals were not named.

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A new Australian aid programme to Vietnam will include construction of a bridge over the Mekong River and so assist local 'development'. It will also speed the present rapid clearing of the forests of the region. Another dubious benefit will be to further increase our huge foreign debt.

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Our beekeepers are rather selective in their criticism of the loss of their resource. Their past attitude on measures to be taken to reduce the problem of Blackberry (in Tas) and Patersons Curse (inland Oz) was one of opposition to any form of control proposed. They also recently opposed the creation of new NPs claiming it would reduce their access to blossom despite the Ministers assurance that existing use would be maintained. Finally they were critical of the new land clearing approval procedures though this decision is one that would ensure that unnecessary and important vegetation would be preserved. Case of their political tails wagging inactive brains ?

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The Rabbit Calicivirus did escape after all. There were only 3 main promises that were made by a supposedly responsible group of scientists on this once unknown to Oz organism. They were - it is being tested at a secure area, it cannot escape; it does not affect humans; and it will not be detrimental to native fauna. Well it did get away; a US biologist claims that lab staff have had reactions during their research (strongly denied by those who have worked only briefly on this virus here); and it is feared that feral predators, mainly foxes and cats will have to prey almost totally on native animals to survive. Not even a one out of three success rate with the predictions.

This really is not good enough for the once eminent CSIRO, and merely proves that the economic rationalists' have another scalp, to their discredit. This ballzup could cost our nation dearly, one way or another.

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Greenhouse gases may be terrific for the RF, but probably not for anything else. Leading climate scientists now strongly believe they can detect human influence on global climate, while the scientific community generally is convinced that there is no doubt that this event is becoming increasingly serious. Global records show that it has been Earths hottest year since reliable records began 140 years ago, putting pressure on world governments to take more seriously the recommendations of the Climate Change Convention. The 10 hottest years since 1860 have all been since 1982. Effects on Oz include a warming trend of between 0.1 & 0.2 C a decade since the early 1950's. Lucky SW & Central Qld though have had an increase of up to 0.4 C a decade. By the end of next century, scientists forecast global average temps will have risen 0.8 - 3.5°, with an increased frequency of storms, floods and droughts if nothing is done.

Despite this knowledge, our decision makers who appear to be under the very strong influence of big business, or of greed (or both?) are taking no action. There is no change even contemplated to our economic system based on constant growth, overconsumption, and a waste of natural resources. Every time a premier returns from an overseas jaunt he announces yet another coal contract and an agreement to open further mines. NSW has seen 2 new mines very recently, and several more are being established. Qld too is in on the action with several mega mines to go ahead there, as well as those big new metals mineral projects that will gobble up vast amounts of energy and turn it into pollution.

Included among recent financial correspondence was the observation "— the explosion in middle class consumers in Asia & Europe expected over the next 20 years, part of the overall theme of a general population explosion. The most massive growth in such a middle class in world history means huge absorption of metals and other commodities as homes and services are upgraded". (This from a share market tipping service, presumably run by economists and not by ecologists or biologists ?)

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An awareness that things must change saw the first Ecological Economists Conference ever held in Oz. This was in November, organised by the Aust & NZ Society for Ecological Economics. There were a large number of representatives from various fields and we can only hope that the results have the potential to be a breakthrough in the ideological impasse between the demands of money and the environment.

We do need both - there are few people these days who are able to produce food for themselves, and even less who breathe oxygen, drink water or consume food taken from the land or water. So - money for consumables; a clean environment for everything else basic to our survival.

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How's this for judge, jury, and executioner all occupying the one throne ? We recently had some concern at our local Council's wanton and over-enthusiastic clearing of very many big old trees and intact understorey prior to roadworks. The grounds for our objection were - (a) Koala habitat area, (b) Wildlife Corridor, (c) Contrary to State Environment Policy re clearing an area over 2ha.

After the area was totally destroyed, we received a reply from councils environmental dept. advising that the Council had done the necessary 'assessment', duly considered the study, and as they are entitled to do under State law approved the assessment under 'delegated authority'. Enquiries about this 'authority' resulted in being informed that one of the engineers held this position. The reply to my question as to what qualifications this person had was "none - other than engineering". I rest my case as I swing on a hempen rope, in the breeze.

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An example of how absurd are our senses of values. OR. One law for the peoples choice and a different one for the people. It was somewhat ironic that about the same time Bob Brown was languishing in a Tasmanian gaol, with a number of others who dared protest at that road disaster - the Tarkine (wilderness) track, we were reminded that a person who was occupying a position as an officer of the Crown - to wit, as leader of Her Majesty's opposition - had been found, years ago by a Royal Commission, to have been devious and dishonest. None of the Tarkine group had committed any crime against persons, property or possessions but were gaoled because they would not agree to desist from future objection to that road. Mr. Gray is still drawing the Queen's shilling, still involved with making laws condemning dishonesty, and Tasmania's electors love him. Strange world ?

THREATS TO THE FOREST --- PART 3

The Papaya Fruit Fly is now established in our Tropics. It was admitted in December that one of the "chickens of the Economic Rationalists has come home to roost". Those who have advocated deregulation and smaller government found Minister for Agriculture Collins quite happy to jeopardise our future and reduce the surveillance by the country's Quarantine Service in many areas of its supervisory and policing roles. Overall, probably just a few million dollars had been saved through reductions in staffing levels which may have allowed this exotic pest into Oz. You will have heard that there is a substantial area 'quarantined' in N.Q. where fruit sent elsewhere into our land has to be treated by soaking in a chemical "Rogor" or BHCC for one minute. Perhaps, unlike me, you do not object to having a deadly poison (it kills insects anyway) added to your food? Maybe though, a number of you are concerned at the possible effects of this import on our forests. You will be totally unaware of this perhaps toxic additive to your food, because retailers are not obliged, legally, to let you know that this has happened, even though they themselves are fully aware (by certification) of this treatment, but are not compelled to inform their customers.

Forty million dollars has been initially allocated to the control of this insect; much of this money will be channelled into inspection and eradication within the RF. You can well imagine - 5,000 untrained and botanically illiterate persons let loose in such fragile areas, vast quantities of biocides used willy-nilly, and certain designated (native) host plant species perhaps be removed despite their particular importance to the local ecosystems. Just proves that you don't need a great deal of intelligence to be a member of a government, or one of its tunnel-visioned advisers and/or decision makers where our future is at stake.

A few more instances of similar threats to both the environment and our food supplies, may convince even some of the most selfish anti-taxpayer lobby that it may prove indeed much more economic to pay a few more dollars in taxes than to spend perhaps 10 times as much for their food, as well as having it laced with a deadly chemical cocktail? Which leads to the next topic ---

Our producers spend over 500 million dollars each year on agricultural chemicals. There are 2,500 varieties they can choose from. Much of this of course just runs away into our rivers and oceans, though usually not a lot is swallowed in our drinking water or eaten with seafood. A fair bit certainly contaminates our meats, fruit & veg and other basic needs. Obviously we do not object to this production system, for there are very few complaints from all of us consumers, and there is not yet a big demand for organic produce. But there is ~~some concern from RF enthusiasts at the unavoidable contamination of our adored forests and the life they contain through the~~ translocation of so many chemicals by 'natural forces' - evaporation and later deposition via rain, fog etc; movement by wind, water, people and animals; careless usage; deliberate misuse and many other actions. We have no idea of what is happening to the soil flora either. Virtually nothing is known of this aspect of the biosphere and whatever beneficial or detrimental effects that may eventuate and effect human, animal, plant or insect life.

Perhaps though, Genetic Engineering will make chemical poisons obsolete. Updating N/L 30. By Sept 1995, 6000 engineered organisms had been released into the environment. Wouldn't it be good if a list of these was published so we could see just what is being manipulated. It would also be nice if we could be absolutely guaranteed that every one is sterile.

The latest releases I have read of are of varieties of Soybean and Canola that are 'Roundup friendly' and are not damaged when this broad spectrum herbicide is sprayed on the crop for weed control.

IT IS FORTUNATE THAT THE IRON RANGE QLD FORESTS STILL SURVIVE.

The 30 year embargo on the release of Federal cabinet documents has led to a very recent series of considerations and decisions made by the Menzies government in 1965, that alarmed those who believe we live in a democracy. Questionable secret decisions led to our country being involved in the destruction of Vietnamese RF among other things, but the item that raised my hackles was the admission that 'our great and powerful ally - the USA' had been pressing us to allow them to conduct chemical warfare experiments in Qld RF. A specific request was that they be allowed to test in the then pristine Iron Range forest, to be done under the guise of "land reclamation" - a seemingly unbelievable reason for operations in a totally untouched and undamaged habitat.

Luckily the majority of the Cabinet would not go along with this demand, we therefore retained the forests and avoided permanent chemical pollution in that area. Can't wait to find out what was included in the '66 agendas!

RECENT NEWS FROM NORTH QUEENSLAND

The rare Mahogany Glider is now under a 'recovery plan'. A \$16 million package was approved to buy 38,000ha of coastal forest defined as the species habitat, while development of another 5,000ha between Tully & Ingham will be prevented.

LOGGING OF RAINFOREST IN NSW HAS CHANGED A LOT IN 15 YEARS

Checking through some old information on file, I was interested to read an old glossy brochure on our local forests that was part of the then available tourist info. It included a reference to timber production in the Hastings Valley in the late 70's as "Nearly 34,000 cubic metres of hardwood are logged every year providing enough timber to build over 700 moderately sized all timber houses, or the frames for about 1500 brick veneers. As well, there are significant areas of commercial RF which currently yield about 16,000 cu.m. of logs for local mills. Most is converted to veneers and plywood - enough to cover 300 football fields each year - as well as providing sawn timber for furniture and cabinet making.

Negrohead [now Antarctic] Beech is the most commonly occurring RF tree. This particular species, which is the only NSW representative of the important northern hemisphere Oak and Beech families, is now reserved from logging. Coachwood is the most important commercial species of RF logged - its timber has a characteristic caramel aroma. Because of its qualities it is used for making high-quality marine and aircraft plywood."

Fortunately RF logging ceased in NSW a few years later, otherwise there would be virtually no stands left locally, other than those reserved in Flora Reserves.

FORESTRY INSPECTION & EXPLANATION - WAUCHOPE AREA

We were fortunate in being able to join a group of about 35 people on a tour of forestry activities and sites on 13.9.95 arranged by the local Catchment Management Committee. Our guides for the day were the District Forester and 2 of his staff.

It was a full day's activities with extended stops at 4 sites that demonstrated various forestry activities and regeneration from past logging. Points of interest were mentioned during our bus trip, while at each stop detailed explanations of the history were given and results observed. Questions from those attending were welcomed and answered in a frank and understandable manner. As well, stops for morning tea at a picnic area/lookout point and for lunch at a popular Flora Reserve were made.

Our first [and to me, the most interesting] site was at a Eucalypt plantation in Cairncross SF which was established in 1974 & 1977 and where "thinning" was now being carried out by a logging contractor. Poor soil fertility and too frequent fires had resulted in a lesser growth rate than normal, so many of the trees nominated for removal were suitable only for woodchips, though some sawlogs and more valuable poles were available. John Fulton explained the economics of that particular operation - it would not have been viable if a market for woodchips was not available as the higher value material was insufficient to recover costs, both of Forestry and the logger's. It was almost totally mechanised with just 2 men working at thinning about a hectare each day, cutting perhaps 400 stems. One fellow operates an excavator based processor [cuts; barks; removes the crown] while a forwarder picks up bundles of logs for transport to the road edge and loading trucks.

This style of operation is very efficient in terms of volume of timber handled while minimising soil disturbance by eliminating of snig tracks and dumps. But it doesn't do much for the local or national employment situation though, as someone pointed out. All this equipment is quite expensive and is imported so it does help overseas employment while at the same time increasing our foreign debt. I don't know whether this is the intention for exploiting a natural resource. (Since our tour, the contractor has acquired further machinery, operated by one extra employee and able to double output. This, of course will result in forest being logged twice as fast but increase employment by only a third - great economics but not good for our social structure.)

There was a brief stop at a Flooded Gum Eucalyptus grandis regrowth area in Bril Bril SF. This was in a moist gully which had been logged around 40 years ago and siculturally treated [removal of unwanted trees, probably associated with some form of other disturbance such as fire]. There were some fine, large Flooded Gums emergent from a now well established rainforest understorey.

Morning tea at the old fire tower site in Bellangary SF - a great lookout spot of course. Historically, this was not too far from the old forest HQ, where up to 200 men were based for many years, during which time they worked in that forest on logging, maintenance and silviculture activities. It was abandoned a couple of decades ago, after 'changed work practices' and mechanisation did away with most of the manual work that used to be necessary. Nearby we looked at an area of Blackbutt, Eucalyptus pilularis that had been heavily logged in the early 1960's and saw good regeneration of this species.

The well known Wilson River Flora Reserve [where that big Red Cedar was illegally felled by vandals, described in a N/L last year] was our lunch spot. There is some magnificent RF here though we did not get a chance to give it more than a cursory look as most of the non-eating time was spent by our hosts giving the group a run down on much of the present and past forestry situations. There has been a lot more forest set aside as reserves in recent times, and sensibly corridors linking many of the more ecologically important areas have been defined, and these too will be protected from logging, and presumably too frequent "hazard reductions" burnoffs. There was also some discussion on the current proposal for a Werrikimbie Wilderness declaration, and the reasons for it, advantages, disadvantages, etc.

The final, and by now well behind schedule stop, was at a spot where recent thinning of natural Blackbutt regeneration in Mt. Boss SF had been carried out. This area had been last logged about 30 years ago. After this time, the regrowth had become well established and too dense for suitable sawlogs to develop due to competition, and it had become economic to thin out the trees. An adjacent area had been similarly treated last year. Again much of the harvest was suitable only for woodchip, but some higher value products were obtained. In the next cut though [particularly as the best stems were retained], virtually all the logs will be of top quality.

It was a long day, but I feel that everyone who attended gained a lot of knowledge and understanding of the situation that now applies to obtaining hardwood timber. The attitude of the foresters who led the tour was certainly in sharp contrast to some recent comments from people who should [and probably do know better] realise that it is not all doom and gloom, but that we cannot continue the over exploitation of our forests that has been carried out in the past, particularly during and since the second world war. The explanation of the local woodchipping operations also eased some of the concerns that have been raised in various venues. If it was merely associated with normal logging operations elsewhere, and not just driven by a dominant objective, there would be less heat on that topic. Probably also though, there would not be a massive 8 million tonnes shipped out every year.

My enquiries to our guides on the amount of woodchip actually sourced from the NSW North Coast ascertained that around 300,000 tonnes is exported each year, though the exporter has a license for a greater amount but due to lack of trees, is unable to achieve it.

OUR DISAPPEARING BUSH [AND OTHER NATIVE VEGETATION]

There are two publications available from the Federal Govt. [free] that I have found to be of great interest - and concern. The 'Native Vegetation Clearance, Habitat Loss and Biodiversity Decline' begins "It is common wisdom that most of the native vegetation cleared in Australia occurred last century and early this century. This is not the case; in the last 50 years, as much land was cleared as in the 150 years before 1945". The effects of past clearance are well known to many SGAP members around Oz. The question must now be, what must ordinary Australians do to bring clearance of our native vegetation to a halt?

The companion volume is 'Landcover Disturbance Over the Australian Continent: a contemporary assessment'. Both can be obtained from Senator Faulkner's Dept [Environment etc.] by phoning 008 803 772. Ask for them and you will no doubt make Sen. John feel that the community is extremely concerned about the subjects discussed, and perhaps that he is doing something useful for a nation that should be worried about its future and matters of basic survival, and not just of transient economic interests.

These 2 papers are numbered 6 and 7, part of "THE BIODIVERSITY SERIES". I subsequently obtained further papers that seemed of interest, though I have not yet had a chance to peruse them. The other available items are # 1 Biodiversity and its value, # 2 Australia's Biodiversity: an overview of selected significant components, # 3 Country in Flames: proceedings the 1994 symposium on biodiversity and fire in North Aust., # 4 Refugia for Biological Diversity in Arid & Semi-arid Aust, # 5 Two Way Track - Biodiversity Conservation & Ecotourism.

REPTILE OF THE MONTH -- THE LAND MULLET EGERNIA MAJOR



EGERNIA MAJOR

(Land Mullet)

by Steve Sinclair

Just as you know you are in RF when you hear the machine gun-like call of a Lewin Honeyeater, it is the same when you catch a lucky glimpse of this lizard. Last winter, when cutting up an old fallen tree I was distressed to find a big, torpid mullet in the rotten centre of the log, though rather thankful that it was in one piece. Fortunately member Ross Sadler is an expert in the reptile field; his advice was to place it in a tea chest with lots of mulch in a sheltered situation, until we heard its springtime stirring. We duly released it where we had found it. Subsequent sightings appear to confirm that it suffered no ill effects, much to my relief.

Isn't this a great sketch by Steve Sinclair! The first of a number to be seen in these pages we trust.

This fine creature does strongly resemble its fish namesake - shiny black or a very dark brown body with yellow ringed eyes. Range is SE Qld to about Gosford NSW and size can reach 66cm or just over 2 feet long. Found only in RF and adjacent wet sclerophyll margins. Belongs to the large family scincidae, the skinks,

many of which most of you will be familiar with. I've often wondered what they eat - does anyone know of their diet? They are a common resident of the forest, though are extremely shy and seldom seen. There are a number in our forest, but you really have to sneak around to get a good view of one.

MUCH OF CAPE YORK HAS AT LAST BEEN PROTECTED TO SOME EXTENT

1200km of its east coast has been declared a Conservation Zone covering 3.6 million ha. The whole of the Cape is a tropical biodiversity zone unequalled in Oz; naturally there are efforts being made to secure and protect its west coast as well as central areas of importance.

WHILE WE ARE MENTIONING Nth Qld I HAD TO CHUCKLE OVER THIS AD

(For an investment at Mission Beach) "Lugger Bay beach houses are a natural. Hiding amongst RF canopy" (must be really very tall houses). Activities include trekking (sounds exciting, wonder what it actually is.) The ad wasn't in some isolated local paper, it was in a national daily. Indicates that you don't require education to be a 'developer' ravaging a natural treasure.

(THERE IS A NEW HEAVY DUTY (?) " PEST REPELLER " ON THE MARKET

Our local NRMA journal usually distributes a mail order booklet urging people to buy various crap products, as part of advertising revenue. Among the yuppie items we should all have is this repeller 'A success in the USA - now available in-Australia'. For only \$139 you can have one of these handy gadgets "that repels pests cleanly and safely by using sound waves". "designed to rid your home of fleas, ticks and spiders". Claimed to be effective over any open area to 325m.

Now, if this thing is as good as claimed, it should do away with those 'moszkie zappers' which despite assertions from some users, are unable to discriminate species, attracting insects from adjacent areas and annihilating them all, the beneficial or neutral ones as well as those we decree threaten our very survival.

ALL YOU'VE EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT THE ' DEFERRED FOREST ASSESSMENT ' PLAN

This intended compromise between development conservation pressures has, of course, been criticised by both sides. The idea was to set aside 6 million ha of forest to protect a minimum 15% of pre 1770 cover, a minimum 60% of remaining 'old growth', and a minimum 90% of present wilderness. Financially, a whole \$6 million has been allocated for interim protection, while \$107 million is set aside for relocation and retraining of forest workers.

Criticism has so far been strong from the miners ("Forest Plan Locks Up Ore'), timber industry (of course), political opposition ("The Socio-economic Effects On Country Towns Not Taken Into Account"), land owners ("An Attack On Basic Property Rights"). Conservationists concerns include the unfairness of including forests that have been logged or even clear felled within, say, the past 10 years; the omission of high conservation value habitat.

The loss of jobs is a valid concern, but the provision of generous financial assistance to those displaced, and the offer of alternative jobs in the fast growing softwood (pine) plantations surely could not be fairer. Everyone is concerned about the poor old forest families, not as many worried about species and associated biodiversity loss.

Not much sympathy seemed to have been given to the 6,500 Commonwealth Bank employees who were 'shed' in the past couple of years, the 450 Challenge Bank people who will be sacked once the Westpac takeover is effected, with a closure of 45 branches. I could quote another 50 organisation with similar job losses - it is just a fact of modern life.

THERE ARE SOME STRANGE FACTORS IN DEFINING " OLD GROWTH FOREST "

Whilst it does not alter the actual status of the area, individual discretion is allowed on whether to evaluate areas under 25ha to be so classified and included as old growth. Certainly, locations less than 25ha are not generally included in district mapping of forest types.

Another of the criteria when determining if a site is old growth, is to randomly sample a 20m sq plot in each 10 ha grid (in wet forests) for a "stump count", which is then calculated on an equiv. number per ha. If it is determined that there are more than 5 stumps per ha it is not old growth. There is no guarantee these 'random samples' are not taken over the most degraded areas within a forest being assessed. Greater freedom is allowed over more recently logged areas (i.e. within the past 30 years) where, if it is calculated that there are no more than 9 stumps per 10 ha, it can still be described as "old growth". This apparent paradox is an admission that recent practises have resulted in a more intensive logging system than in earlier times; more disturbance has ensued and is taken into account.

TIME REALLY FLIES WHEN YOU ARE HAVING A LOT OF FUN. Still have lots to tell you. Next time perhaps.

A happy new year to all of you ! Good growing ! Save the Rainforest !