

WILDLIFE DIARY

February 2010



Great Finds

Did You Know?

Snakes on the move, species unknown

Blue Mudskippers, *Scartelaos Histophorus* (Pisces: Gobiidae) continue to be sighted at Ormiston. It's good to see their recent return appears to be long term.

Spotted wobbegong, *Orectolobus maculatus*, sighted at Moreton Island.

POPULATION MATTERS

Continuous population growth, fuelled by an expected increase of 2.3 billion people on the planet by 2050, is multiplying the impacts of climate change and will be ecologically unsustainable.

<http://www.optimumpopulation.org/opt.more.climate.html>

Birds became fat as dinosaurs died

A sedentary lifestyle is often blamed for causing obesity among humans. Apparently, the same thing happened to certain birds 65 million years ago. The disappearance of dinosaurs from earth at that time made the flying ancestors of the emu, cassowary and the ostrich lazy, new Australian research has found. Instead of soaring away from gigantic beasts, they fattened up and became flightless, the study by Canberra's Australian National University (ANU) found.

New Zealand's now extinct flightless moa birds descended from a small, South American flying fowl, the examination of mitochondrial genome sequences found. Previously, scientists believed flightless birds, also known as ratites, shared a common flightless ancestor. Study director Dr Matthew Phillips said that as dinosaurs died out, natural selection favoured the fatter birds. The extinction of the dinosaurs likely lifted predation pressures that had previously selected for flight and its necessary constraint, small size. Lifting of this pressure and more abundant foraging opportunities would then have selected for larger size and consequent loss of flight.

The ancestors of flightless birds originally flew to other parts of the world from the northern continents, Dr Phillips said. His inference challenges the established view that ratite birds are relics of the former Gondwanan supercontinent, which joined Africa, South America, Australia, Antarctica, New Zealand, India and Madagascar. Source: <http://www.themorningbulletin.com.au/story/2010/01/22/birds-became-fat-as-dinosaurs-died/>

Did you know that in addition to producing most of the oxygen we breathe, the ocean absorbs some 25 percent of current annual carbon dioxide emissions? Half the world's carbon stocks are held in plankton, mangroves, salt marshes and other marine life. Seagrass meadows, for example, which flourish in shallow coastal waters, account for 15 percent of the ocean's total carbon storage, and underwater forests of kelp store huge amounts of carbon, just as forests do on land. The most efficient natural carbon sink of all is not on land, but in the ocean, in the form of *Posidonia oceanica*, a species of seagrass that forms vast underwater meadows that wave in the currents just as fields of grass on land sway in the wind.

Source: http://www.seagrasswatch.org/Info_centre/Publications/E-Bulletins/SW_31Dec09.pdf

The Australian Government has stated an unconditional commitment to reduce the Australian greenhouse gas emissions by five per cent on year 2000 levels by 2020. Yet Treasury modelling indicates that Australia will increase its greenhouse gas emissions from 553 million tonnes in 2000 to 774 million tonnes by 2020. A new study by Monash demographers Dr Bob Birrell and Dr Ernest Healy estimate that over 80 per cent of the increase will be due to an additional six million people Australia is slated to accommodate over if this period. Over 60% of this growth in population is attributable to net overseas migration and the subsequent adoption of our unsustainable consumption patterns

The dominance of the introduced **Coastal Brown Ant**, *Pheidole megacephala* at the Gold Creek Reservoir site is cause for concern as there is increasing evidence that this species can invade natural habitats with detrimental effects on native ant communities and possibly those of other invertebrates. For more information about this ant see:

<http://www2.dpi.qld.gov.au/horticulture/5103.html>



Great Walks

Many of our creeks in the Bayside area support turtles, Tarradarrapin Creek supports many freshwater turtles so does Lota Creek.

WWW

Population matters
www.population.org.au

Jane Goodall on overpopulation

<http://growthmadness.org/2007/11/30/jane-goodall-on-overpopulation/>

How Many People Can Live on Planet Earth?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JypyASU8Aik>

Freshwater turtles

They live in water, but breathe air. If food and water are in short supply, they can travel over land or bury themselves and withdraw into a state of dry season inactivity known as aestivation. If danger threatens, they retreat into the safety of their shells.

Part of a reptile fauna with a 215 million year fossil history, Australia's freshwater turtles are amazing creatures, easily identified by their shells – the upper shell is the *carapace*; the lower is the *plastron* – and their webbed, clawed feet.

Four of Queensland's 16 native freshwater turtle species live in the greater Brisbane and Bayside region. No turtle species have been lost from the Brisbane region since European settlement. However there are indications over the past decade that urban turtles may be under pressure. Pigs, foxes, goannas, water-rats and birds dig up turtle nesting burrows and eat their eggs.

Turtles' tendency to travel overland makes them susceptible to vehicle strikes. They are sensitive to the pollution, degradation and alteration of waterways and can drown if entangled in rubbish or washed over dam or weir walls.

The white-throated snapping turtle *Elseya albagula* has been reported in Brisbane but sightings are very rare and there has been no confirmation of established populations.

Some of the other species found in the greater Brisbane Bayside region are.

Name: **Broad-shelled river turtle** *Chelodina expansa*, our largest freshwater turtle.

Description Brown to blackish-brown carapace up to 35cm; head and limbs grey, thick neck, flat head.

Habitat Medium/large rivers, permanent lakes, swamps and lagoons.

Name: **Eastern long-necked turtle** *Chelodina longicollis*, also known as snake-neck turtle.

Description Dark brown or black carapace, 24cm; head and limbs grey; snake-like neck about as long as carapace.

Habitat Wetlands, lagoons, dams, slow-moving rivers and creeks.

Name: **Saw-shelled turtle** *Wollumbinia latisternum*, has a serrated carapace and can predate on cane toads.

Description Brown to dark brown carapace, 24cm; head and limbs olive-brown; short spiny neck.

Habitat Flowing streams, occasionally dams and rivers.

Name: **Brisbane short-necked turtle** *Emydura macquarii signata*, our most common freshwater turtle.

Description Olive to brown carapace, 28cm; head and limbs grey; yellow facial stripe; short smooth neck.

Habitat Permanent, slow flowing streams, large standing water bodies.

Help our freshwater turtles

- Retain and restore waterway vegetation.
- Reduce waterway pollution.
- Slow down for turtles on roads near large water bodies and creeks.
- If you see a red-eared slider, please report it to your local council.

Source: http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/bccwr/environment/documents/the_regenerator_winter_2008.pdf

Never doubt that a small, group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. Margaret Mead.

