

# WILDLIFE DIARY

October 2009



Great Finds

Did You Know?

The storm birds have returned. They can be heard day and night. **Common Koel**, *Eudynamis scolopacea*, (eu, Gk, well,good; dynamis, Gk, power; orientalis, Latin, eastern) and the **Channel Billed Cuckoo**, *Scythrops novaehollandiae*. (Scythros, Gk, sullen faced) .

## POPULATION MATTERS

We cannot continue to add the equivalent of a city larger than Canberra every year to Australia's population and still expect to maintain the health of our environment and our quality of life.

Australia Conservation Council, Charles Berger

### Flying Cane Toad

Common myna (Indian myna), *Acridotheres tristis*, are a member of the starling family (Sturnidae). The bird is a generalist, an opportunistic omnivore capable of feeding on a wide variety of food. They are 23 – 26cm in length weighing between 82 – 143g. They are brown in color with glossy black head, neck and upper breast and bright yellow bill, eye skin and legs. Juveniles however have brownish heads. Common myna are very social birds and aggressively defend their territories. They compete for valuable nesting hollows and are known to have evicted native parrots and kill eggs and chicks. The habit of building multiple nests in a nesting hollow and this can be a deterrent to native species.

### Indopacific Humpback Dolphin

The **Indopacific Humpback Dolphin**, *Sousa chinensis*, is identified by its longer rostrum (snout) and equilateral shaped dorsal fin. Adults have white colouration on their dorsal fin and the upper back is a dark colour, juveniles are light grey. It is similar in size to the Bottlenose Dolphin but only about 100 live in the bay. Currently they are provided very little protection.

### River Mangrove

The **River Mangrove**, *Aegiceras corniculatum*, belongs to the family Myrsinaceae. The species is distributed from South-east Asia to Australia on tropical and subtropical coasts of Queensland, Northern Territory, Western Australia and New South Wales. A healthy plant can tolerate very salty waters or survive inundation by freshwater for long periods. They were once used for stakes in the culture of oysters. This species is important for the provision of valuable habitats for juvenile commercial and recreational fish and as a species suitable for rehabilitation measures in the stabilisation of river banks and estuaries. It is also a major source of pollen for beekeepers its flowers appearing as a clusters of scented white flowers, which smell like rotten bananas.

New research led by AEDA's Kirsten Parris has found that traffic noise is drowning out the mating call of some frogs. It's believed that this could be one of the reasons for the large-scale decline of frog populations in Melbourne. If the females can't hear the male frogs then they have less chance of breeding successfully.

Source: [http://www.aeda.edu.au/docs/Newsletters/DPoint\\_33.pdf](http://www.aeda.edu.au/docs/Newsletters/DPoint_33.pdf)

If we set a goal of protecting 30% of each vegetation type, does this mean 70% of it can be destroyed? And to make matters worse, is 30% protected enough to make a difference – to sustain a species in the first place?"

Today only 17 per cent of South East Queensland (SEQ) is in public ownership (national park or state forest), compared with 43 (%) percent of the equivalent land mass in the greater Sydney region. and 33 (%) percent in Melbourne. Further, SEQ's human population is resulting in 75km<sup>2</sup> of bushland and agricultural land being converted into housing and other urban purposes each year.

Australian research has found that the huge amounts of water is harvested directly from clouds in upland rainforest. Cloud forests are those with canopies high enough to be in the clouds. They are able to harvest water from the clouds directly, as well as from rain. It was calculated that most forests capture 10 to 25 per cent more water from clouds than falls as rain.

Did you also know native vegetation clearance can also affect regional rainfall patterns. Recent research indicates that regional rainfall and atmospheric energy patterns have been changing in certain areas, which have been extensively cleared. Of particular interest is that, while annual rainfall decreased from 1947 to 1988 over the agricultural area of south-western Australia, meteorological records indicate it increased by a similar amount over uncleared native vegetation further to the east. A later study observed that convective clouds may form earlier in the day over extensive areas of native vegetation than over similar land that has been cleared for agriculture.

### Great Walks

Art walks in the Redlands, visit

[http://www.more2redlands.com.au/Explore/Leisure\\_Attractions/Trails/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.more2redlands.com.au/Explore/Leisure_Attractions/Trails/Pages/default.aspx)



# WWW

Population matters  
[www.population.org.au](http://www.population.org.au)

Interested in protecting our coast?  
<http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/coastalplan/>

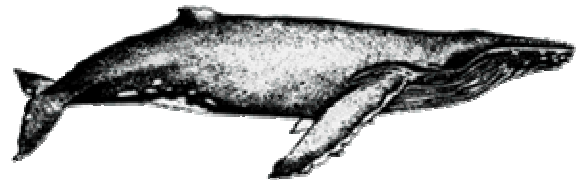
Enviro literacy site  
<http://www.enviroliteracy.org/article.php/428.html>

# Humpback Whales

(*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

Humpback Whales belong to the group of whales known as rorquals, a group that includes the Blue Whale, Fin Whale, Bryde's Whale, Sei Whale, and Minke Whale. Rorquals have two characteristics in common: dorsal fins on their backs, and ventral pleats running for the tip of the lower jaw to the navel area. They are characterised by the possession of baleen plates for sieving the krill upon which they feed. Humpbacks are still the third most endangered species of all the big whales, but now their numbers are increasing 13% each year. They are the fifth largest animal on this planet, growing up to 15 metres in length with a weight of up to 45,000kg (99,000lbs) - equivalent to 11 elephants or 600 persons each!

Humpback Whales are regular visitors to the coastal waters off southern Queensland. Each year, during winter, humpback whales migrate from Antarctic waters to the warm waters of the tropics for calving. There are five – six distinct migratory groups associated with different feeding grounds in Antarctic waters. The east coast population are group five. This stock was depleted by whaling in the 1950's, declining from 10,000 to 500 by 1963. Today at least 1200 humpbacks migrate 5000km to the eastern coast of Australia. Groups of whales or 'pods' start to arrive at the southern Great Barrier Reef in mid-June and in the following weeks they move further along the Great Barrier Reef concentrating in the southern Whitsunday's area. On the southern migration back to Antarctic waters, a large proportion of the whales stop over for a few days in Hervey Bay. Most humpbacks will have left the Queensland coast by the beginning of November. Whales do also come into Moreton Bay, first record of a whale in Moreton Bay was one taken off Sandgate on the 12th Dec 1872. It measured 10m (33). Tangalooma Resort now sight about 50 inside the bay annually but with Japan appearing not to recognise Australian Antarctic Territory, or its 200-nautical-mile offshore Exclusive Economic Zone our humpbacks are at risk. These humpbacks support the national whale and dolphin-watching industry said by the International Fund for Animal Welfare to be worth about \$273 million.



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A humpback is readily identified by the shape and colour pattern of its dorsal fin and fluke (tail) each is as individual in each animal as are fingerprints in humans. Also, the southern population of humpback pectoral flippers are black on top. The head of a humpback whale is broad and rounded when viewed from above, but slim in profile. The body is not as streamlined as other rorquals, but is quite round, narrowing to a slender peduncle (tail stock). The top of the head and lower jaw have rounded, bump-like knobs, each containing at least one stiff hair. The purpose of these hairs is not known, though they may provide the whale with a sense of "touch." There are between 20-35 ventral grooves, which extend slightly beyond the navel.

Humpback whales feed on krill, small shrimp-like crustaceans, and various kinds of small fish. Each whale eats up to 1,361kg (1/2 tons) of food a day. As a baleen whale, it has a series of 270-400 fringed overlapping plates hanging from each side of the upper jaw, where teeth might otherwise be located. These plates consist of a fingernail-like material called keratin that frays out into fine hairs on the ends inside the mouth near the tongue. The plates are black and measure about 76 cm (30") in length. During feeding, large volumes of water and food can be taken into the mouth because the pleated grooves in the throat expand. As the mouth closes, water is expelled through the baleen plates, which trap the food on the inside near the tongue to be swallowed.

Humpback whales reach sexual maturity at 6-8 years of age or when males reach the length of 11.6m (36') and females are 12 m (40'). Each female typically bears a calf every 2-3 years and the gestation period is 12 months. A humpback whale calf is between 3-4.5 m (10-15') long at birth, and weighs up to 907 kg (1 ton). It nurses frequently on the mother's rich milk, which has a 45% to 60% fat content. The calf is weaned to solid food when it is about a year old.

## The issue of Noise!

Decades ago, the myth of the "Silent Sea" was widely believed. This impression was reinforced by the inability of humans to hear well under water. In reality, the world's oceans are noisy places, and becoming noisier due to human activities. Whales may use sound to attract mates, repel rivals, communicate within a social group or between groups, navigate, or find food. Disruption to any of these biologically important functions could interfere with normal activities and behaviour, thereby affecting the reproductive success of individuals and the sizes of populations. Behavioural effects could have serious consequences for populations, if they involved large-scale effects - disruption of migration, feeding, breeding, or other critical activities. Sound, particularly low-frequency sound, propagates very efficiently underwater; some human activities could affect quite large areas of the ocean. The impact of noise recently recognised by a US court ruling that has now placed restrictions on the use of mid frequency sonar, a threat to marine mammals, during a major exercise currently taking place off Hawaii. See for more information: <http://www.wdcs.org/news.php?select=470>  
<http://www.wdcs.org/stop/pollution/index.php>

*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.

