



Conservation

DON SAUNDERS AND JENNY LAU

Mission Beach, Qld, after Cyclone Yasi, February 2011. Cassowary habitat at Mission Beach was also devastated by Cyclone Larry in 2006. For further information see "Cassowaries and Cyclones" p13. Photo courtesy Rainforest Rescue

BROLGA RECOVERY GROUP – VICTORIA

It is estimated that the isolated population of Brolgas in south-west Victoria and adjoining habitat in eastern South Australia is now down to 400-450 birds.

In March 2010, the Brolga Recovery Group (BRG) was launched at Lake Bolac in south-western Victoria with the objective of promoting awareness and conservation of this species, particularly on private land. This is extremely important because the major flocking sites, many breeding sites and much of the Brolga's food source occur on private lands.

Brolga is listed under the Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 and an Action Statement, as required under the Act, has been prepared. The Brolga Recovery Group's activities will be based on that Action Statement, particularly the management actions proposed in that document.

There is considerable uncertainty regarding the potential impact of the vast array of wind farms proposed across Brolga habitat in south-western Victoria. One of the key issues is the size of buffers which should apply between wind turbines and Brolga flocking and breeding sites. The Department of Sustainability and Environment has prepared draft Guidelines for the Assessment of Potential Wind Farm Impacts on the Brolga (2009), and these include proposed buffer distances; however, these have no formal status and are therefore subject to argument in the planning process. Another weakness in the draft Guidelines is that they do not consider flight paths or movement corridors. BRG has written to both the Planning and Environment Ministers in the new Victorian Government requesting that the draft Guidelines be formalised, with some amendments, to create greater certainty for all interested parties. BRG has also requested that a Brolga Protection Overlay, based on the formalised Guidelines, be established across the species' range.

At the most recent meeting of BRG (March 2011), it was agreed to support the issue of a Brolga Calendar to relevant landowners to encourage them to record the presence (or absence) of the birds and their activities. This was an initiative of BOCA and the Friends of the Brolga in the 1990s but had lapsed. Data generated by the new Calendar will be analysed by the Chairman of BRG, Dr Barry Kentish, who is a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Environmental Management at Ballarat University.

The Brolga Recovery Group is a community-based Affiliate Member of BOCA. The Group would welcome more members to assist with its work – membership \$15.00 pa. Contact the Secretary, Sue Mudford suem@tfn.org.au Address: "Barranna", 255 Dundonnell Road, Woorndoo, Vic 3272. Phone: 03 5599 5223.

THREATENED SPECIES – RECENT LISTINGS

Australasian Bittern has been listed as endangered under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. The Fairy Tern (subspecies *neréis*) has been listed as vulnerable under the same Act. Recovery plans will be prepared for both these newly-listed species.

NOISY MINER – A THREATENING PROCESS IN VICTORIA?

The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) has made a Preliminary Recommendation that involves the Noisy Miner being listed as a Potentially Threatening Process. The title of the nomination is "Reduction in biodiversity resulting from Noisy Miner (*Manorina melanoccephala*) populations in Victoria". SAC has provided detailed evidence supporting the nomination for listing. This report is available from the Department of Sustainability and Environment – contact Martin O'Brien on 03 9637 9869.

SWIFT PARROTS

By the time you receive this issue of *The Bird Observer* the first of the two annual surveys for Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater will have been held (22 May).

The second survey will be held on 7-8 August. For more details or to register for a site during the surveys contact Dean Ingwersen (d.ingwersen@birdsaustralia.com.au) or phone 1800 621 056. Also, please call this number to report a Regent Honeyeater sighting at any time.

For those that are not very familiar with the habits of Swift Parrots, there is an excellent new DVD, "The Swift Parrots of Muckleford". A feature of this is the photography of Debbie Worland showing close-up details of Swifties feeding in trees and on the ground. There is also a guide to separating this species from similar lorikeets and parrots. The 25-minute DVD is available from Debbie Worland, email: swiftparrotsofmuckleford@hotmail.com. Price: \$20.00 + postage & handling (\$4.95 within Australia, \$9.95 overseas).

CHRISTMAS ISLAND

The Feb-Mar 2011 issue of the CSIRO magazine *Ecos* has an article on Christmas Island titled "Island on the edge". The four-page article leads with the statements "An environmental catastrophe is unfolding on Christmas Island" and "The unique wildlife of the island is struggling to cope with the impact of humans and introduced pests".

To the many birdwatchers who visit Christmas Island this is disturbing, but not entirely surprising, news. The terrestrial impacts of phosphate mining have now been shown to extend into the ocean, polluting the water and smothering corals; Yellow Crazy Ants remain a serious threat to wildlife despite extensive efforts to control their population; a range of other introduced predators such as the Wolf Snake, rats and cats also threaten the indigenous wildlife; and the massive detention centre, built at the far end of the island, not only occupies important habitat but also creates intensive road traffic which kills wildlife, especially the Robber Crabs.

In September 2010, a Christmas Island Expert Working Group reported: "The Island has extraordinary terrestrial, subterranean and marine conservation values that are being diminished by management deficiencies and threats that are pervasive, chronic and increasing" and "The principal finding of the working group is that the extremely high biodiversity values of Christmas Island are in a parlous state."

The Group made more than 30 recommendations addressing "the long-term and substantial changes that will be required for the successful future management of Christmas Island and its surrounding seas as a single ecological entity" and warned "that a 'business-as-usual' approach in future will mean that management will fail and the extraordinary national asset that is Christmas Island's biodiversity, will be replaced by a combination of many introduced and a few resilient native species."

If the biodiversity of Christmas Island is to be protected from further losses it is essential that the Group's recommendations are implemented as a matter of urgency.

REFERENCES :

Gilligan, J (2011), Island on the edge, *Ecos* 159, 20-23.

Christmas Island Expert Working Group (2010), Final Report of the Christmas Island Expert Working Group to the Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts – available online at <http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/christmas/final-report.html>.



In Victoria, the irony of Earth Hour being on the same weekend as the Formula 1 Grand Prix motor race and duck shooting was not lost on Leunig. *The Age*, Friday, 25 March 2011. Courtesy Michael Leunig