

## Amber Station Field Weekend November 2016

A total of 18 participants attended the field weekend to Amber Station, the sixth in a series of events held by Northern Gulf Resource Management Group's Wildlife Management Project in conjunction with the North Queensland Natural History Group to investigate the natural attributes of a property in the Northern Gulf Region. The project is funded by the National Landcare Program.

Amber Station is located near Mt Surprise and has a permanent stream, Fossil Brook, running through the area we investigated. This stream feeds the Lynd River, also on the study area. The weather was hot and dry and the general condition of the habitat was quite dry, apart from the streams described above, and a number of springs and farm dams scattered through the study area, basically comprising the area of the property located to the west of the Lynd River.

The property has a diverse geology, including areas of granite, basalt and sandstone. We were privileged to have geologist John Nethery come out to show us some of the geological features of the area as well as a presentation on the geology of the Georgetown-Chillagoe district.



Geologist John Nethery imparting his great knowledge to the group at Amber on a basalt ridge located between Fossil Brook and the Lynd River. Photo John Booij

In 2015 a bird survey was done on six sites located on the property, with observations recorded of the other wildlife encountered. This trip in 2017 also included bird surveys of the 6 sites, plus more intense survey of and trapping for other wildlife under the permit of Dr Noel Preece. This involved active searches and spotlighting of the sites and the property in general. The aquatic fauna of Fossil Brook was also investigated

The vegetation of the study area in general and more specifically the six survey sites was also assessed, with 75 species of woody plant identified by Don Franklin.

In all there were 94 species of bird, 25 species of reptiles, 4 species of amphibians, 10 species of mammals, 24 species of butterfly and two dragonfly species recorded.

### Fishes

There were 3 fish species positively identified from Fossil Brook - the Archer Fish (*Toxotes chatareus*) Barred Grunter (*Amniataba percooides*) and the Spangled Grunter (*Leiopotherapon unicolor*) At least 5 more species were present but unable to be positively identified. These were, tentatively, the Sleepy Cod (*Oxyeleotris lineolata*), Black Bream (*Hephaestus fuliginosus*), a rainbowfish, a species of eel-tailed catfish and a species of fork-tailed catfish. Other aquatic wildlife included the Mitchell River Prawn (*Macrobrachium rosenbergii*) and Redclaw (*Cherax quadricarinatus*)



Archer Fish (*Toxotes chatareus*) Photo Keith & Lindsay Fisher

### Mammals

Only larger species of mammal were sighted, despite trapping for small mammals which was, as is sadly often the case, unsuccessful. Mammals recorded included 3 feral species, the Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), Feral Pig (*Sus scrofa*) and Feral Cat (*Felis catus*). Also recorded were one monotreme, an Echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*); five species of macropod ranging in size from the Eastern Grey Kangaroo (*Macropus giganteus*) to the Rufous Bettong (*Aepyprymnus rufescens*), and a Little Red Flying-fox (*Pteropus scapulatus*). Microbats were sighted but were not able to be identified.





Rufous Bettongs (*Aepyprymnus rufescens*) were commonly sighted on the property, even coming to visit us in camp.

### Amphibians

As is often the case, the most commonly seen amphibian, indeed often the most common vertebrate, was the Cane Toad (*Rhinella marina*). Three native frog species were sighted. The Ornate Burrowing Frog (*Platyplectrum ornatum*) was located on sand nearby both the flowing Fossil Brook and a dry creek bed with a small waterhole located in it. Bumpy Rocket Frogs (*Litoria inermis*) and a Common Green Tree Frog (*L. caerulea*) were also sighted close to Fossil Brook.

### Reptiles

With the extra search effort and pit trapping, the reptile list was extended from 10 to 25 species with one species from the 2015 field trip, the Black-backed Yellow-lined Ctenotus (*Ctenotus eutaenius*) surprisingly not encountered this time. Three more *Ctenotus* spp. were encountered plus 3 other skink species including the Chillagoe Fine-lined Slider (*Lerista storri*). Seven species of gecko, notably the Rough Knob-tailed Gecko (*Nephurus asper*) and the recently described Einasleigh Rock Dtella (*Gehyra einasleighensis*) were encountered. Two species of dragon, the Tommy Roundhead (*Diporiphora australis*) and the Gilbert's Water Dragon (*Lophognathus gilberti*) were observed, with the latter species being restricted to along Fossil Brook. Other lizards included Burton's Legless Lizard (*Lialis burtonis*) and a Floodplain Goanna (*Varanus panoptes*).

Other groups of reptiles found included three snake species, the "night tiger" phase of the Brown Tree Snake (*Boiga irregularis*), a young Common Tree Snake (*Dendrelaphis punctulatus*) and one of the most exciting finds, a number of aquatic Arafuran File Snakes (*Achrochordus arafurae*) in Fossil Brook. One crocodile species Johnston's Freshwater Crocodile (*Crocodylus johnstoni*) and one turtle



species, the Saw-shelled Turtle (*Wollumbinia latisternum*) were also encountered in the waters of Fossil Brook. Another dam on the property contained 21 freshwater crocodiles.



Rough Knob-tailed Gecko (*Nephrurus asper*) an inhabitant of rocky areas. Photo Michael Anthony



Arafuran File Snake (*Achrochordus arafurae*) a fully aquatic snake inhabiting the permanent waters of Fossil Brook and the Lynd River. Photo Michael Anthony



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### Birds

The total of bird species observed over the field weekend was 94, including 30 species not sighted in 2015, bringing the total over the two surveys to 103. Nine species sighted in 2015 were not found this time, notably the Black-throated Finch (*Poephila cincta*) and the Brown Treecreeper (*Climacteris picumnis*).

Ten diurnal raptor species were recorded, including the White-bellied Sea-eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) and the Eastern Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), present due to the permanent water.

Three nocturnal species the Australian Owlet-nightjar (*Aegotheles cristatus*), the Southern Boobook (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*) and the Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*) were also present.

Due to the presence of permanent water there were many waterbirds including Black-necked Storks (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*), Pelicans (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*), Australasian Darters (*Anhinga novaehollandiae*) and seven duck species.



Australian Hobby (*Falco longipennis*) in flight. Photo John Booij

Smaller birds in general were not common. Two species of finch, the Double-barred (*Taeniopygia bichenovii*) and Zebra Finches (*T. guttata*) were seen. A few small flocks of Budgerigars were evident. There was very little flowering taking place, however Brown (*Lichmera indistincta*) and Banded Honeyeaters (*Certhionyx pectoralis*) were in evidence on one flowering eucalypt.

Five kingfisher species were sighted including both Laughing (*Dacelo novaeguineae*) and Blue-winged Kookaburras (*D. leachii*) and three of the smaller species, the Sacred (*Todiramphus sanctus*), Forest (*T. macleayi*) and Azure Kingfishers (*Alcedo azurea*).

### Invertebrates

Thanks to Don Franklin and John Booij, a good number of butterfly species were observed. Notable among these is the Tawny Coster (*Acraea terpsicore*), a recent immigrant to Australia which has spread quickly from the top end of NT right across Queensland and is now a commonly sighted species. The striking Scarlet Jezebel (*Delias argenthona*) was one of many species feeding on a flowering Broad-leaved Carbeen (*Corymbia confertiflora*).



Scarlet Jezebel (*Delias argenthona*). Photo John Booij

Two species of dragonfly the Blue Skimmer (*Orthetrum caledonicum*) Chalky Percher (*Diplacodes trivialis*) and the Scarlet Percher (*Diplacodes haematodus*) were recorded.





Female Blue Skimmer (*Orthetrum caledonicum*). Photo Keith & Lindsay Fisher



Male Blue Skimmer (*Orthetrum caledonicum*). Photo Keith & Lindsay Fisher