

RIVER Report Contents

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Pg</u>
<u>Mission Statement</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Set Up of the RIVER Group</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Bird Group report</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>Plant Group report</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>Invertebrate Group report</u>	<u>21</u>
<u>Fish Group report</u>	<u>24</u>
<u>Water Quality report</u>	<u>29</u>
<u>Walks & Talks overview</u>	<u>30</u>
<u>Mini-RIVER</u>	<u>32</u>
<u>Input into Management Processes</u>	<u>33</u>

Mission Statement

The Ross Island Volunteers for Estuarine Research (**RIVER**) is a community based Environmental Monitoring Volunteer Group for the Townsville/Thuringowa Coastal Plains.

RIVER has been supported by **Coastcare** for 3 consecutive years and by the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers (**ATCV**), its umbrella organisation, who have housed the group since 1996.

ATCV's mission is to attract and manage a force of volunteers in practical conservation projects for the betterment of the Australian environment.

RIVER aims to raise community awareness of the importance (regarding biodiversity and productivity) and the vulnerability of our river systems.

RIVER tries to achieve this through

- steadily increasing the knowledge about the plants and animals that live in and around our river systems,
- recruiting and training of volunteers for ongoing monitoring programs,
- publication of data and discussion of results with interested stakeholders, and
- a range of nature education and awareness raising initiatives (based on our increased understanding) targeted at the community in general and at schools in particular.

The **RIVER** Group's main objective is to involve the Townsville/Thuringowa community in the collection of background data on their local river systems and coastal wetlands. This information includes baseline data for and detected fluctuations in the flora, fauna and water quality of the rivers, as well as field studies within a limited time frame. These data will be made available to management agencies to assist with responsible decision making ensuring a sustainable use of our rivers.

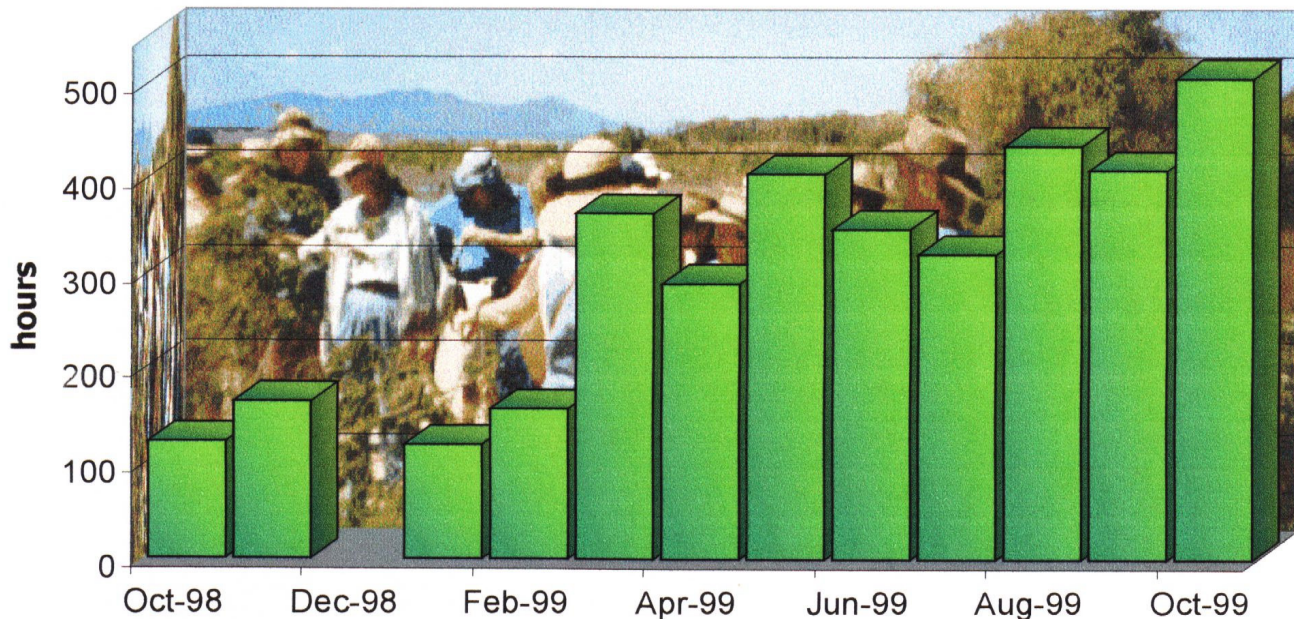
RIVER's second main objective is to increase community understanding and public awareness in the twin cities with regard to the irreplaceability and status of our river systems, and to advocate responsible, sound management.

Outcomes:

- Background information on the estuarine environments of the rivers of the Townsville / Thuringowa Coastal Plains, primarily focused on the Ross River and its tributaries.
- Better decision making and community participation through increased knowledge of the river and estuary environments around Townsville.
- Education of the community on the significance of our rivers and estuaries, and the merit of holistic catchment management, through the volunteer monitoring program and through programs targeting schools and the general community.
- Generation of a sense of ownership on behalf of the community of the local rivers by giving community members input into the management process through provision of baseline data and reporting detected changes.

RIVER is built entirely on community participation. Volunteers have been and continue to be recruited from the general public and are trained via workshops in species identification and monitoring techniques. Afterwards, volunteers start participating in the ongoing projects and help to devise and implement new programs. Volunteers are asked to contribute four hours a fortnight (to their subgroup) to maintain the field studies and periodical monitoring programs.

The RIVER Group's Monthly Volunteer Hours (since Oct '98)



The information collected through **RIVER's** projects will be widely available to the community and used in management planning. Volunteers are also encouraged and trained to interpret the values of the mangroves & saltmarshes of the Townsvillefrhuringowa Coastal Plains and water quality in general to the wider community, through a bimonthly newsletter, walks and talks, interpretive sessions, workshops and school presentations.

The **RIVER** Group was fortunate to have a full-time coordinator funded through Coastcare, since late July 1996, managed by the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers. Funding for this position will, however, have ceased by August of this year.

RIVER is broadly divided in five subgroups specialising in different areas of monitoring:
a) mangrove & saltmarsh plants, b) birds, c) fish, d) invertebrates and e) water quality.

The Set Up of the RIVER Group

Half way through 1996, the joined forces of the Department of Defence (Army) and the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers (ATCV) set up the Ross Island Volunteers for Estuarine Research (**RIVER**).

The Army was relocating the 10 Terminal Regiment and the Army Maritime School from Sydney to a new site in Townsville, on the edge of the Ross River. Goondi and Bumphead Creek form the borders of the selected site for a base, also to be used as a mooring for Army vessels on the shore of the Ross River. The construction of the Ross Island Barracks involved the establishment of an environmental management plan for the site. As part of the monitoring and community involvement requirements of the management plan, the **RIVER** Group was set up to monitor the impacts of the development on the surrounding

areas and to collate a long-term baseline data-set for the environment of the Ross River estuary as a whole. Successful applications were made to fund a coordinator for the project through Coastcare and Waterwatch. But until the grants were actually received, the Army put forward most of the initial budget to start the group off.

JoAnn Resing (in those days Director of the Nature Factory) was contracted to start the group and began recruitment of volunteers until a coordinator was appointed. Late July 1996, Ian Butler was appointed as coordinator and it took him less than a month to organise the first training course for the first **RIVER** volunteers (mid-August '96). This training course consisted of a series of information sessions, two nights a week over a period of four weeks.

The initial volunteer intake attracted 28 volunteers, 85% of which were still enthusiastic and committed at the end of the training course. This group of 24 volunteers split into six subgroups of four volunteers each focusing on different aspects of the Ross River's estuarine environment: Water quality, Fish, Invertebrates, Birds, Mammals and Plants. Most of these groups met on a regular basis to the end of 1996, reviewing literature and discussing ideas to think through proper monitoring programs.

At the end of January 1997, Ian Butler left Townsville to take up a position overseas and a new coordinator, Craig Doolan, was appointed. Although the appointment procedure was handled swiftly, the old and new coordinator (hereto unfamiliar with **RIVER**) didn't have a lot of time to make a smooth transition. Moreover, the change of coordinators took place over the Christmas/summer holiday period, a time when the group had ceased most activity, and as such a lot of impetus was lost.

One of the major problems encountered through much of 1997 was a lack of 'manpower' to successfully run field trips for all projects. This was not due to a lack of interest of group members, but caused by a sheer structural problem. The initial split of the group into six subgroups of just four volunteers left marginal numbers for each project: if one or two people did not turn up for a field trip, then only two or three could be left to do the work. As can be expected with any volunteer effort, some of the first volunteers lost enthusiasm, and consequently labour-intensive subgroups struggled, particularly the fish and invertebrate groups.

Unfortunately, after around a year-and-a-half, the time came for Craig to move on and in June 1998 Tanya Korn, until that moment a dedicated volunteer, was fortunate enough to obtain the position of **RIVER** Coordinator.

As Craig's departure was not hasty, there was time to communicate between the coordinators, which avoided the loss of information and impulse that occurred when Craig took over from Ian. It was also beneficial for the group to find a coordinator in an enthusiastic volunteer with inside insight of the group dynamics.

A very active year later, volunteers Bonita Pilling and Floris van der Leest acted respectively 1 and 3 months part-time in the coordinator's position, from May to August 1999. For a short time, **RIVER** also enjoyed administrative support by Pam Oates.

Currently the **RIVER** Group consists of 16 dedicated volunteers and a handful of occasional helpers who form five thematic subgroups.

Since the end of Coastcare funding, **RIVER** has been led by a management committee comprised of one volunteer representative from each subgroup. The committee meets monthly to discuss issues, collate data and set future directions for the group.

Volunteer by Group	Suburb	Volunteer by Group	Suburb
Bird Group		Fish Group	
Chris Jakku	West End	Graeme Buckley	Oonoonba
<u>David Reid</u>	North Ward	<u>Ralph Zillmann</u>	Hermit Park
<u>Glenda Jefferies</u>	Cranbrook	Tanya Korn	West End
Jo Wieneke	Belgian Gardens	Invertebrate Group	
Marion Gaemers	Railway Estate	Bonita Pilling	Mundingburra
Plant Group		Floris van der Leest	James Cook Uni
Damien Burrows	Aitkenvale	Graeme Buckley	Oonoonba
<u>Jason Doyle</u>	West End	<u>Mike Fulloon</u>	Cranbrook
Karyn Lawrence	Mundingburra	Water Quality Team	
Mike Fulloon	Cranbrook	Denise Seabright	Rollingstone
Education Officer		Marion Gaemers	Railway Estate
<u>Floris van der Leest</u>	James Cook Uni	Peter Brock	Mundingburra

The persons whose names are underlined are currently forming RIVER's Management Committee.