

BIODIVERSITY – FLORA AND FAUNA

Introduction

Johnstone Shire includes outstanding and significant areas of Biodiversity. The World Heritage Area comprises 47% of the land in the Shire, but it does not contain all of the Biodiversity of significance. Efforts by the Johnstone Shire Council, State organisations, and community groups continue to make positive efforts towards the preservation and restoration of fauna and flora.

News

Johnstone Shire Council has continued work on the Shire's Biodiversity Strategy. The strategy will integrate efforts towards conservation and is due for completion in 2003.

The Johnstone Shire Community Revegetation Unit continued to gain volunteers. Since the year 2000 the group has grown greatly, and now has 85 members on the books. Sourcing funding remains an annual struggle for the Revegetation Unit, as they would prefer to be able to work more projects and have better assurance of project continuity.

The Vegetation Initiative, run from the Community Revegetation nursery, provides landholders with trees and technical support. 6000 trees were supplied in 2002.

A major management changeover occurred for State forests in 2002. State forests are now managed by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS). They will therefore be reclassified to 'Protected Area' under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. In general, the land use (including harvest) of State forests will continue as before, but there may be some reassessment and renegotiation to preserve significant habitat and vegetation areas.

The Cassowary rehabilitation and relocation program near Garner's beach was implemented last year through the QPWS. The program fosters young cassowaries separated from their parents, prior to release back into the wild. The program

also researches cassowary handling and rearing procedures, in case of any future need for a captive breeding program.

The QPWS volunteers are a group organised last year that work with the ranger at Mission Beach to track and monitor cassowaries, as well as care for injured cassowaries. The QPWS continue to engage in community meetings to raise public awareness about interaction with cassowaries.

The QPWS worked on the Cassowary Critical Habitat Map, which is due to be completed in 2003. The map will provide information that will greatly facilitate planning to manage human activity near cassowary habitat.

The introduction of changed speed limits in the Mission Beach area has had an apparent success towards the reduction of cassowary road deaths. No adult cassowaries were recorded killed by cars in 2002 after the speed limit introductions.

Estuarine Crocodile populations in the Shire remain very low. A revision of crocodile management is currently in progress. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) currently conducts public education to manage inappropriate human behaviour in crocodile areas. Recently, redesigned crocodile warning signs, and signs with interpretive information have been erected in the Shire.



Cassowary Chick at the QPWS Rehabilitation and Relocation Program.

Indicators

The Johnstone Shire Council in conjunction with landholders established 3 new areas of conservation covenant on freehold land. This brings the total of properties with covenant to 52, and a total area of 1403.94 hectares. This represents about 10% of the remnant vegetation on private land.

An additional land for wildlife agreement on 47 hectares took the total of properties to 7, with an area altogether of 142.93 hectares.

The Community revegetation group revegetated 9.4 hectares in 2002. A further 30.4 hectares of remnant vegetation was rehabilitated. Work occurred along the North and South Johnstone rivers, Liverpool creek, and wetlands on Clancy Estate. Other activity involved the control of *Hymenachne* and Pond Apple in the Liverpool catchment.

Other revegetation, under the Wet Tropics tree-planting scheme, involved a further planting of 12.7 hectares along Liverpool Creek. Together these efforts have provided an unbroken linkage between Cowley Beach and the Basilisk Range. The Centre for Tropical Rehabilitation nursery revegetated another 2 hectares on property near El Arish, under a contract for Powerlink.

General information on land clearing is contained in the Land Management section.

Remnant vegetation in the Johnstone Shire had the following status when last assessed by the Queensland Herbarium in 1999.

Vegetation Mgt Act Status	Total Johnstone Shire	Area outside WHA and Protected Area Estate
Endangered	6433 Ha	2772 Ha
Of Concern	17036 Ha	3214 Ha
Total remnant vegetation outside WHA and Protected Area Estate within the Johnstone Shire—19242 Ha		

(Based on 1999 Qld Herbarium certified regional ecosystems mapping)

No changes in the area size of any parks, protected areas or reserves occurred in 2002.

The Johnstone Shire contains 31 regional ecosys-

tems as classified by the EPA, Queensland Herbarium (last updated 2002). Since the last report in 2000 most ecosystems remain at the same classification. However, the EPA considers the status of "*Mesophyll vine forest with pink bloodwood (Corymbia intermedia) emergents, on wet to very wet well drained piedmont fans*" worsened to a level of 'Of concern.'

At present in the Shire, Regional Ecosystems have the following status:

No concern at present	Of concern	Endangered
14	5	12

A total of 782 cassowary sightings were recorded in the Mission Beach area: 193 positively identified adult males, 188 adults of unidentified sex, 137 sub adults and 264 chicks.

(Sightings do not provide a reliable indicator as yet, since they will vary according to the level of community interest. However, the EPA Threatened Species Unit is planning to trial a monitoring program that samples cassowary DNA from droppings. This could provide information on individual birds, populations, and habitat use.)

4 known cassowary deaths were recorded in the Mission Beach area. This comprised one adult and three sub adults. The adult bird and one sub adult were killed within the boundaries of the Johnstone Shire.

16 crocodile sightings were reported, 6 of these crocodiles required relocation.

No changes occurred to the conservation status of any species known to be present in the Shire. Data on Fauna needs to be gathered.



The Community Revegetation Group

Report card for Biodiversity

Criteria	Grade	Recommendation Group	Explanation
Action on recommendations 14 of 19 recommendations actioned to date	B	-Biodiversity Strategy -Interpretation ranger for Shire -Cassowaries and Crocs	-In progress and due 2003. -Position not created by EPA but mitigated by regional work conducted. -Many plans and approaches are underway.
Filling deficiencies in data	C	-Regional mapping of conservation values -Fauna monitoring -Vegetation monitoring	-Part of Biodiversity Strategy development. -No detailed information available. -Information was gathered in 2002.
State of the Shire	B-	-Vegetation, flora and fauna	-No major changes reported. -Revegetation has continued.
Goal Achievement	B-	-All	-Progress by organisations through planning and action.
Community Awareness	B	-Public education -Events	-Cassowaries and Crocodiles have been promoted by various organisations. -Community organisations.

OVERALL GRADE B-

Conclusion

2002 was a year of progress rather than of achievement. Most organisations were at work developing and updating strategies to manage biodiversity. At the same time, no major evidence of losses to biodiversity was reported. However, a great deal more information is required on the status of fauna in the Shire.

Continuing positive contributions by community groups displays the commitment and care amongst the public for the environment.

Future Direction

Some of the deficiencies in data may be addressed by projects such as the advances in Cassowary monitoring and vegetation mapping. The completion of the Shire Biodiversity Strategy will integrate and advance direction towards the goal of ecological sustainability.

