



## LUCI Update No 35 ... April 2024

Greetings - great habitat planting weather!

### *Fascinating Fairy-wrens*

How could you not love Fairy-wrens with their delicate size, the beautifully coloured plumage of the males, their incessant hopping with perky tails in the air and their complex communal behaviour? In our local forested landscapes, it's not uncommon to see Variegated, Superb and Red-backed Fairy-wren species.

While we may take Fairy-wren presence for granted, many people living in more developed areas never or rarely get to see and enjoy these 'little balls of pure joy'<sup>1</sup> and it's not hard to figure out why this might be so. Superb and Variegated Fairy-wrens need dense shrubby understorey for protection, foraging and nesting while the Red-backed Fairy-wren favours grassy understorey for nesting and all rely on a supply of insects and seeds.<sup>2</sup>



Red-backed Fairy-wren *Malurus melanocephalus* can often be found in grassy understorey where they build their nests.

*Remember to feed the food web...  
No grassy, shrubby understorey then less  
insects, less Fairy-wrens*

If you are keen to be involved in helping build a knowledge base about Fairywrens, [you can join the Fairywren citizen science project on the eBird platform](https://ebird.org.au/projects/fairywren-citizen-science)

### *A regeneration journey by LUCI member Kathy Finch*

Purchased in January 2014, my 170 acres at Thornton was overused farmland with compacted creek flats, extensive ring lock fencing and erosion issues in the various gullies that ran through the property, courtesy of the 2013 floods.



According to locals, the previous owner had run as many as 300 sheep, goats and cattle through the paddocks and cleared unsuitable areas for grazing and growing various crops, leaving the land covered in lantana, scotch thistle and balloon cotton bush.

Initially bought as a lifestyle/grazing property, all the cattle were sold following the devastating bushfires in November 2019. Apart from a short period of agisting, no cattle have been on the land since then allowing time for natural regeneration to take place.

The first koala appeared on the property in October 2014. This male (nicknamed Romeo) appeared every year thereafter in the same area of the gully and stayed until

<sup>1</sup> [Tiny little balls of pure joy: why the superb fairywren took our 2021 Australian bird of the year](https://www.birdsinbackyards.net/birds/featured/Sm-tiny-little-balls-of-pure-joy-why-the-superb-fairywren-took-our-2021-australian-bird-of-the-year/)  
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.birdsinbackyards.net/birds/featured/Sm-all-insect-eating-birds>

<https://coffsbotanicgarden.com.au/fairywrens-at-the-bottom-of-the-garden/>

January when he would move to another part of his territory. While busy cleaning up the property and taking care of stock, I noticed his yearly presence but other activity wasn't investigated at the time.

This all changed after the 2019 bushfires.

After the November fire, around December/January, I noticed several koalas including Romeo had survived the fire and moved into the gully area. One female appeared quite affected by the experience, staying in the same tree for a day or two before she began to move around the trees and resume eating. I monitored her closely and was able to take photos that enabled easy identification of her for the future. I called her Jemima, and she continued to appear for the next three years, along with her healthy joey. Other koalas were present in the creek at this time, including a female with a large joey. Wildlife cameras captured footage of them on a regular basis. Lockyer Community Action Group arranged a koala survey to monitor tree usage across three zones in the gully area, with one zone showing over 70% usage in the 12 months post-fire.



Jemima, a regular visitor post-bushfire. Photo Kathy Finch.

The focus of the property is now very much on revegetation, both natural regeneration and planting of additional trees. The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) funded my first 400 trees and some lantana control through Healthy Land and Water in 2022. IFAW with Great Eastern Ranges and LUCI added to that

planting last month with another 360 trees and understorey plants as part of the Bunyas to Border project. Thanks to the wonderful group of volunteers, the planting extends the buffer zone along the edge of the koala gully creating a "food forest" to be used for wildlife carers in the area.

It has been a long and, sometimes, difficult journey but I thoroughly enjoy watching the land transition back to healthy habitat and the resulting increase in wildlife. While the focus has been predominantly on koalas, many other species have benefitted including gliders, possums, echidnas, wallabies, bandicoots and a variety of bird species including raptors such as kestrels, falcons and owls.



Volunteers organised by a LUCI Project Coordinator helped plant 360 trees in March. Photo Kathy Finch.

I am very blessed to live where I do and look forward to continuing the rehabilitation of the property over the years to come.

### ***Nocturnal Bird Surveys...by LUCI Project Officer Joe Joseph***

Over the summer, some preliminary work commenced for the nocturnal bird survey project and now with the Powerful owl breeding season looming ahead, the project is fully in swing. This project aims to complement LUCI's [Birds of the Lockyer Uplands Conservation Action Plan](#), which has seen 3.5 years of baseline bird (mainly diurnal) survey data recorded by Roger Jaensch on 22 LUCI members' properties.

The nocturnal bird survey project hopes to supplement Roger's work using bioacoustic

monitoring and the implementation of audio moths, as well as the 'BirdNET analyzer', a program that detects bird calls in audio files.

The bioacoustics recorders will be deployed on at least 10 LUCI members' properties.



Joe Joseph (LUCI Project Officer) installing a bioacoustic recorder for the Nocturnal Bird Survey project.

The results of this monitoring along with Roger's findings from 3.5 years' bird surveying will be discussed with participating landholders and support experts to map the next steps in LUCI's bird surveying efforts. Details of a proposed date for this discussion will be forthcoming.

Find out more about LUCI's bird survey project and how landholders can be involved by contacting [LUCI info](#)

### *Horsfield's Bushlark* by Roger Jaensch

Horsfield's Bushlark *Mirafra javanica* is a small brown bird not much bigger than a finch, inhabiting grasslands over much of Australia including our region. It is, however, often overlooked because of its plain appearance, resembling several other grassland birds.

The bushlark has a chunky, almost sparrow-like bill, short tail, and often flutters above ground with stiff wingbeats before landing. Occurring in the same grassland habitat, the similar Australasian Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae* has a fine bill, long tail and

loping flight. Previously, the former species was named Singing Bushlark in recognition of its rich prolonged song, commonly given while soaring high above ground, and which often includes mimicry of calls of other birds (documented as including quail and more than 20 other locally occurring species).

There have been only a few records to date in the LUCI Bird Project.



Horsfield's Bushlark. Photo Roger Jaensch.

<https://www.sciencealert.com/in-an-incredible-discovery-wrens-teach-their-babies-to-sing-before-theyre-hatched>

### *Further reflections on UQ Professor Martine Maron's talk on birds in the Lockyer at LUCI's AGM ... by Anita Huber*

Part of Martine's talk focused on the native Noisy miner and its habits. Martine noted that the Noisy miner, while native, has been listed as a key threatening process negatively impacting threatened native bird species. It should be noted that the native Noisy miner has become a threat because they have thrived in landscapes that we

have altered. These are some of my take-aways from Martine's talk.

Noisy miners live in colonies, with a substructure of coterie that work together to fight other coterie, or the coterie will also band together to chase away other species. Most smaller or similar sized birds to a noisy miner end up being excluded from an area.

Noisy miners like edges of forests; they like an open structure. Sometimes their preferred open structures can extend quite a way into a forest, eg they've been observed 20-30km from the forest edge at a site in Carnarvon.

They hate understorey.



Noisy miner *Manorina melanocephala*. Photo Graeme Chapman.

Noisy miners like eucalypts due to the lerps (sweet by-product of sap-sucking insects) on these trees. They also like plants with year-round nectar flowers eg some year round flowering grevilleas, callistemons.

To deter Noisy miners, and assuming it suits your planting plan/objectives, then:

- plant *Callitris*, *Allocasurina*, *Casurina* species (these do not get lerps)
- go for rough barked eucalypts eg stringybarks as Noisy miners like those eucalypts less or
- go for a shrubbier woodland - really dense, complex understorey
- spiny plants also good, as are soft leaved plants eg green leaved rainforest type species
- replace lawn with dense shrubs

Culling Noisy miners has been looked at in Victoria and NSW and found to be, sometimes, very effective and sometimes not. For example, sometimes when a few have been shot, they do not come back. Other times, 1000's have been shot, and they come back in their 1000's.

I remember Martine mentioned something like, once other birds are excluded by Noisy miners, it's hard to get them back. But if the other birds are still around, the miners seem to find it a bit harder to form their stronghold that excludes the other species.

Martine talked about her property in Glamorgan Vale where they just, or mostly, planted rainforest species (as a rainforest dense planting) without trees bearing nectar rich flowers, and also have long, knee-high grass in the grass areas. They do not get any noisy miners.

[Does culling noisy miners have conservation benefits for small woodland birds?](#)

### ***Bunyas to Border (B2B) project***

Project coordinator Justine Rice has been exceptionally busy implementing the B2B project, which is part of the Koala Climate Corridors initiative spearheaded by Great Eastern Ranges and IFAW. The project aims to assist wildlife to adapt to climate change and build resilience by restoring habitat stepping stones across the regional landscape.

Activities thus far has included deployment of 36 Tree Troffs (wildlife watering stations), several community planting days with over 1,500 native trees planted on private properties (and more to come) and a KoalaFest event involving over 100 visitors keen to hear from a panel of koala expert speakers and to learn what conservation action is being undertaken by local community groups. The event provided a fantastic networking opportunity and an opportunity to learn more about the B2B project.



Wildlife veterinarian Dr Rosie Booth presenting. Photo John Hopwood.

On May 18<sup>th</sup>, Wildlife Queensland's Paul Revie will present a workshop on Greater Glider (GG) and Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby (BTRW) conservation. Paul has already provided spatial analyses of priority locations in the B2B corridor for the deployment of Glider nest boxes and camera monitoring for the presence of BTRW.

A Bird Day is planned for June and will feature bird expert speakers and activities centred around bird conservation. For more information on B2B aims and activities and how you can be involved, contact Project Coordinator [Justine Rice](#).

### ***NRRP funded weed management...by HLW Project Coordinator Renee Ould***

Healthy Land & Water (HLW), with the support of LUCI, are racing towards the finish line, actively delivering on the Natural Resource Recovery Program funded by the Queensland Government.

The NRRP prioritises capacity building activities and targeted incentives to help improve and preserve important native vegetation in the Lockyer Uplands and Little Liverpool Range.

Release of biological control agents have continued over the optimal summer season in an effort to support land managers with cat's claw creeper (*Dolichandra unguis-cacti*) and madeira vine (*Anredera cordifolia*). Since the start of December 2023, officers have released 13,500 cats claw creeper jewel beetles and 3,050 madeira vine beetles across the Lockyer Uplands. Delivery of these beetles from

Gympie & District Landcare Group are starting to slow down as we move into cooler months, with beetles being released fortnightly until the end of June.

Contracted bush regeneration crews from Ecosure have also begun works at selected sites to assist landholders with their weed management practices, targeting lantana and other weeds of national significance (WONS) to improve native vegetation condition. Ecosure's crew will continue to implement weed control works until the end of June, when the program is set to wrap up.



Ecosure personnel getting hands on with cutting-and-pasting lantana on the edge of a dam on a LUCI member's property.

LUCI & HLW are also looking to finalise details on an **upcoming workshop focusing on managing cane toad threats on properties and providing more information on local native frog species**. Details will be advertised soon so keep an eye out!

### ***LUCI's Summer Walk***

LUCI's summer walk in the Hampton area was well attended. Host Dougal Johnston prepared some great resources for walkers outlining local geology, regional ecosystems and history of fire regimes and some plant highlights on the property as well as resources on biodiversity on farms. This information package is available on request to [LUCI](#). Thank you Dougal for welcoming walkers and for the excellent resources.

Dougal manages his property for mixed-use, that is, grazing and conservation. At the right time of year, the property boasts a good diversity of ground orchids.



Walk leader Martin Bennett sharing flora ID tips.



Top *Callitris baileyi*, middle *Santalum obtusifolium* and bottom *Passiflora herbertiana*. Photos Martin Bennett.

Our regular walk leader, Martin Bennett, described some of the plant highlights of the day including:

- the near threatened *Callitris baileyi*;
- *Santalum obtusifolium* (Sandalwood) a 2m shrub with edible dark blue fruits, of which there are only 6 records in the Toowoomba/Lockyer area;
- *Passiflora herbertiana*, Native Passionfruit, a slender vine with leaves similar to the pest *P. suberosa*, but the lobes tend to be rounded not pointy as in the pest species, there are only 3 records in Deongwar and Lockyer.

### Native grasses field day

Recently, I was delighted to welcome staff members from Biosecurity Queensland and the Queensland Herbarium to our place to collect native grass seeds. Biosecurity Queensland has been undertaking research on potential biological controls for Giant Rat's Tail grass *Sporobolous pyramidalis*, a restricted invasive species. As part of the research process, any potential, adverse impacts of a biological control on native species must be monitored. Hence, the need for the researchers to collect and propagate native grass seeds.

The Queensland Herbarium officer was keen to collect samples of native grass plants for the Herbarium collection and to complement work on app development of a grass identification key.



Field day collecting native grass specimens and seed.

It was a joy to spend time with people who are as interested in native grasses as I am. It was pleasing to hear their comments on the abundance of insects darting in and out of the grasses, a fundamental part of healthy, functioning food webs particularly for keeping birds in the landscape.

On the day we collected over 30 grass samples with their seeds. While following a natural regeneration approach to managing the grasses, now I realise that intervention is necessary as I watch the exotic grasses (Green panic, Rhodes, Red Natal) gain ground along with the native species.

### *Hairy Geebung a kangaroo snack?*

Endemic to eastern Australia, the Hairy Geebung *Persoonia sericea* is a spreading shrub with hairy yellow flowers and silky hairy young branches and leaves. An understory plant found in woodland and dry open forests, they are difficult to propagate and germination in the wild involves fracturing of the hard seed covering. One germination pathway may be the result of browsing by macropods. A 2009 report described finding a clump of *P. sericea* seedlings emerging from decaying kangaroo pellets at a site in Helidon. [Seed dispersal by kangaroos and their relatives.](#)



*Persoonia sericea* the Hairy Geebung. Photo Penny Kidd.

### *Flora and fauna snippets...by Martin Bennett*

LUCI members at Fordsdale spied a *Underwoodisaurus milii*, Thick-tailed or Barking Gecko, at their place recently. About 10cm long, the gecko is striking for its colouring, that can be pink to purple-brown, its markings including rows of cream to yellow spots and an original tail that has black and white bands, which are not present on a regenerated tail. It is the only gecko in the south-east of the state that has slender fingers and toes that lack pads, which are an adaptation to life on the ground.



*Underwoodisaurus milii*, Thick-tailed or Barking Gecko. Photo Greg Tasney.

The usual habitat of the Thick-tailed gecko is in dry areas where it shelters in burrows or beneath stones or rocks. It feeds on insects and small vertebrates. Found across eastern and southern Australia, its status is of least concern although it is thought to be uncommon in the outskirts of Brisbane.

<https://collections.qm.qld.gov.au/topics/393/thick-tailed-gecko>

<https://www.animalia.bio/underwoodisaurus-milii?letter=u>

The White-brow Hawk Moth *Gnathothlibus eras* has been observed feeding in our Lockyer rain forest on the native *Cayratia acris* (Hairy Grape), *Cayratia clematidea* (Slender or Five-leaved grape) and *Cissus antarctica* (Native Grape). It is a strong, robust moth with a wingspan of about 70 mm. Its caterpillars grow to a length of 10 cms or more.



Native grape, *Cayratia acris*. Photo Martin Bennett.



White-brow Hawk Moth, *Gnathothlibus eras*. Photo Diane Guthrie.



Third instar stage of White-brow Hawk Moth. Photo Martin Bennett.

The moth's eggs are pale green and spherical, with a diameter of about 2 mms. The eggs are laid singly on food plant foliage.

While the White-brow Hawk Moth is a common species in Queensland, its habitat is not widespread in the Lockyer, and it is found mostly in areas of sandstone and elevation. Areas on basalt or floodplains and waterways or with SEVT or Brigalow do not offer suitable habitat for the White-brow Hawk Moth.

<https://lepidoptera.butterflyhouse.com.au/sphi/eras.html>

<https://australian.museum/learn/animals/insects/hawk-moths/>

### ***Interesting links to follow up...***

The intricacies of different insect defence strategies developed over millions of years are fascinating and, as this article demonstrates, can teach human engineers a thing or two...

[Earless moths give engineers new ideas](#)

Pesticides - the dirty dozen

[Pesticides banned elsewhere but still used legally in Australia](#)

Good to read about examples of development that accommodate nature...

[Frog habitat comes along in leaps and bounds](#)

Scientists are discovering the links between habitat loss pushing animals such as bat populations into agricultural and urban areas and viral spillover from bats to humans.

[To prevent the next pandemic, restore wildlife habitats](#) and [protecting biodiversity](#).

Herpetologist, Professor Rick Shine, says the benefits of snakes on agricultural land far outweigh the potential costs.

[Stop killing brown snakes they could be a farmer's best friend](#).

Purchase of a 300,000ha cattle station to boost conservation of the night parrot's habitat. [\\$21m buys 300,000ha for conservation](#)



### **Community support vital to tackle fire ants - a note from the Fire Ant Eradication Program team**

Fire ants, despite their small size, rank among the world's most invasive pests, posing significant impacts to wildlife, pets, farm animals, and humans.

Fire ant could infest more than 97% of Australia, causing our green spaces to become unusable, annual damages surpassing \$2 billion dollars per year, and population declines in 45% of birds, 38% of mammals, 69% of reptiles, and 95% of amphibians. The impacts of fire ants could surpass those of Australia's worst pests combined if left untreated.

#### **Fire ant treatment**

Using handheld spreaders, utility terrain vehicles and aircraft, eradication efforts are in full swing in parts of Lockyer Valley, Southern Downs, Scenic Rim, Somerset, the Gold Coast, Moreton Bay and Somerset. Each property within the treatment area will undergo up to 6 rounds of treatment over 2 years, followed by 5 years of surveillance.

Residents play a crucial role in the ongoing National Fire Ant Eradication Program and are urged to allow fire ant teams access to their properties to conduct eradication activities. These teams carry government-issued identification and will not enter private houses or buildings, just outdoor areas.

Check to see if your suburb or street falls within the eradication treatment area by visiting [fireants.org.au](http://fireants.org.au) or calling 13 25 23.

#### **About fire ant treatment**

Fire ant treatment is not a poison. It is tried, tested, and approved by the [Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority](http://www.australianpesticidesandveterinarymedicinesauthority.gov.au) and is safe for humans and animals. Comprising small pieces of corn grit soaked in soybean oil and a low concentration of insect growth regulator, this treatment is the only proven method to eliminate fire ants and safeguard our way of life. The granules are collected by foraging

fire ants and the treatment prevents the queen from reproducing worker ants - if the queen cannot reproduce workers, the colony will naturally die out.

#### **Identify and report fire ants**

Recognising fire ants is crucial. They are copper-brown with a darker abdomen and measure 2-6 mm in size. These aggressive ants swarm when disturbed and appear in a range of sizes within one nest.



Size of fire ant to scale of key. Photo supplied.

While sometimes mistaken for native ants, their tendency to swarm when threatened makes fire ants easier to distinguish from other species. Fire ant nests have no obvious entry or exit holes and can appear as mounds and flat patches of soil. Nests are usually found in warm, open areas such as:

- lawns, pastures, and garden beds
- near water sources
- on roadsides
- in newly developed areas
- next to or under objects on the ground - timber, logs, rocks, pavers, and bricks
- near utility pits, water, and gas meters.

On rural properties, the most common sightings are near dams, along irrigation and fence lines, edges of cultivated land, in cropland and in piles of organic matter.

Looking for and reporting fire ants is the best way to help protect your family, community, and the quintessential Australian game of backyard cricket, barbecues, and team sports we all know and love. Visit [fireants.org.au](http://fireants.org.au) or call 13 25 23 for more information.

### Interested in...



...installing a water station for wildlife on your property? There are only eight [WIREs](#) Tree Troffs left after the initial offer by LUCI to landholders in the Bunyas to Border landscape. For more information on eligibility, contact [justine@lockyeruplandscatchmentsinc.org.au](mailto:justine@lockyeruplandscatchmentsinc.org.au)



...installing a nest box on your property that is large enough for a Glossy Black Cockatoo? LUCI received a range of wildlife nestboxes as part of a project coordinated by HOPE Toowoomba. We have a couple over and if you would like one of these large, weatherboard constructed nestboxes, contact [LUCI info](#)

...propagating native plants? A very popular workshop with Karen Melissa of Tanglewood Natives. Register your name at [LUCI info](#) to be in the next intake and we will advise when the next workshop is on.

### Upcoming events...

- ☛ **Greater Glider and Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby workshop** with Wildlife Queensland's Paul Revie, **Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> May, 10:00am-3:00pm**, Helidon Community Centre, Arthur Street Helidon. Reserve your place via <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/816297025377?aff=oddtcreator> or email [justine@lockyeruplandscatchmentsinc.org.au](mailto:justine@lockyeruplandscatchmentsinc.org.au)
- ☛ **LUCI's Autumn Walk, Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> May, Lockyer National Park in the Goldmine Road area.** Arrive from 8:30am for a 9:00am start. Our walk leader, Martin Bennett, will guide us through different Eucalypt forests and woodland featuring the Helidon Hills' amazing diversity of understorey plants. To register your place and get meeting point details contact [LUCI info](#).
- ☛ **LUCI's Winter Walk, Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> July, Paradise Creek Reserve.** Arrive from 8:30am for a 9:00am start. Involving a slightly higher fitness level than our usual walks, the walk, led by Martin Bennett, will take in Eucalypt forest with SEVT and Belah understorey and a riparian SEVT area. To register your place and get meeting point details contact [LUCI info](#).

**Interested in becoming a LUCI member? Only \$10 per person or \$20 per family per year. Join like-minded others and enjoy free workshops, guided walks, access to grant programs and fauna surveys on your property and lots more.**

If you would like to share your stories and photos, we'd love to receive them. If you do not want to be included on the email list for this newsletter please let us know at [LUCI](#). Newsletter Editor Diane Guthrie 0413 333 681

**Stay connected, it's healthy!**