



BLACK IRONBOX



BROKEN RIVER ABOVE URANNAH CK.



WATERHOUSIA



MOUTH OF URANNAH CK.



BELOW THE CAUSEWAY



EEL GRASS IN BROKEN RIVER



BROKEN RIVER

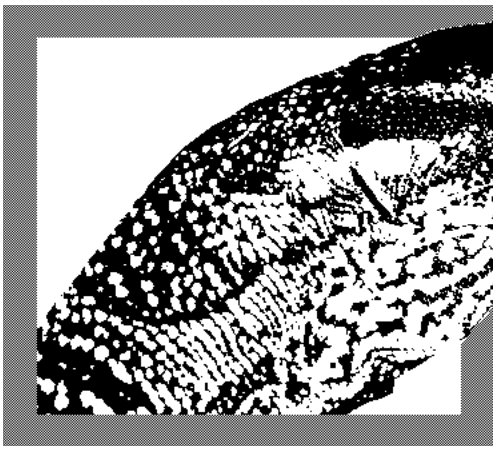


SQUATTER PIGEON

IRWIN'S SNAPPING TORTOISE



URANNAH



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URANNAH

What's at Risk?

A preliminary investigation into its biological assets.

A report prepared at the request of Ken Dodd and his family, traditional owners, living on Urannah Station.

BACKGROUND:

- The Urannah dam site was first identified and investigated about 1970, again in the mid 1970s and was originally recommended for construction in conjunction with Clare Weir to support irrigation development in the Lower Burdekin. When the Burdekin Falls Dam proposal was initiated¹, the Urannah proposal was shelved. One justification for choosing the Burdekin Falls over Urannah was given as the high environmental costs.
- In 1997 The Queensland State Government still had plans to develop the project.
- Meanwhile, the Indigenous Land Corporation finalised the freehold title of the property [finalised 31Mar99. The agreement was signed 1Apr98.]
- As well, the Bowen Basin coal industry was burgeoning, and their demand for water for their operations was growing, and continues to grow exponentially.
- Water property rights have also changed: Importantly the ownership of tradable water rights was separated and made independent of land title.
- In recent years rainfall along the Central Coast of Queensland has been much less than average, prompting advocates for the Urannah Proposal to lobby for the dam.

¹ In March 1980, the Queensland Parliament authorised the establishment of the Burdekin River Project. Construction of the Burdekin Falls Dam commenced in 1984 and completed 1987.

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT BIOLOGICAL ASSETS

HILLS & VALLEY SLOPES

- Ironbark slopes
- Native pasture - pre-European vegetation example

RIVERBANK AND FLOOD CHANNELS

- Bluegum forest with dispersed koala population [**'endangered' regional ecosystem.**]
- Black iron box [**rare**]

RIVER

- Irwin's snapping tortoise
- Fish - five species
- Crocodile- possible lagoon habitat [not sighted]

BIRDS

- Scarlet honeyeater
- Black-necked storks [Jabiru]
- Squatter pigeons
- Grey falcons [possible]
- Barn owl type [possible]

OVERALL

- No stylos or introduced grasses seen

DESCRIPTION OF INVESTIGATION

For 3 days [24/9/04 -26/9/04], Ian Sutton [assisted by Mona Wells and Anekke Meeder] accepted the invitation to visit Urannah Station and made a brief study of the country for about 3 kilometres surrounding the Causeway [20°56.522'S 148°20.777'E].

24Sep04 Day 1: Walk south along entrance track through polar gum to bluegum forest and return via river.

25Sep04 Day 2: Climb ridge 1.3km to the east [20°56.794'S 148°21.096'E] and return down spur

26Sep04 Day 3: Visit homestead and drive to Adaluma [20°51.547'S 148°16.758'E], stopping at lagoon adjacent to Mt Cauley.

A photographic log was kept.

A preliminary plant species list started.

Records of animal observations were made.

HILLS & VALLEY SLOPES

- Ironbark slopes
 - Those slopes not within the reach of normal flood events are composed mostly of ironbark forest.
 - Ironbark provides an additional food source for koalas.
- Native pasture
 - Understorey consisted of native grasses, dominated by 3-awned, black spear and kangaroo grasses
 - No buffel grass was identified.
 - No introduced legumes were noticed.
 - Confirmation of these preliminary findings need to be made towards the end of the wet season, as in the current drought conditions, it is difficult to identify dried understorey plants.

RIVERBANK AND FLOOD CHANNELS

- Bluegum forest with dispersed koala population.
 - Both Urannah Creek and Broken River have a main channel with numerous adjacent flood channels.
 - Bluegums [*Eucalyptus tereticornus*] dominate this landscape.
 - This area is mapped as an 'endangered' regional ecosystem.
 - Many mature trees are estimated at 30 metres in height.
 - Koala scats were found under nearly all of the trees examined.
Further scat surveys need to be carried out in the extensive bluegum forest on Urannah Creek, upstream of the homestead.
 - Two koalas were spotted on day 1 and photographed. GPS locations 20°57.248'S 148°20.191,E and 20°57.452'S 148°19.922'E.
Although Koalas are large animals, they are not easily seen during the day. The next visit will focus on spotlighting of the animals
- Black iron box [*Eucalyptus raveretiana*]
 - rare??
 - Mostly found along the banks of the main channels.
 - Mature specimens to 30 metres and enormous boles.
 - Best examples to be found at proposed dam site.

RIVER

- Irwin's snapping tortoise [*Elseya irwini*]
 - One specimen was collected in the shallow lagoon immediately upstream of the causeway, photographed and released on day 2.
 - This lagoon has at least two resident tortoises - probably more.
 - under the NCA 1992 Regulations of 1994, it is scheduled as a "common species" but "*in reality it has not been accessed since it was described --- if a detailed survey was made of this turtle, it would [probably] equate to a threatened species but at present we are data deficient.*"²
 - It is a cloacal ventilating species and related species have delayed maturity and low fecundity. It should be an autumn - winter breeder.

² pers comm. Col Limpus 1Oct04.

- Fish - five species
 - During a short underwater inspection of the causeway lagoon five species of fish were identified: rainbow fish, 5-barred grunter, spangled perch, sooty grunter and blue catfish.
- Crocodile- possible lagoon habitat [not sighted]
 - A deep [2 metres or more] 500-metre-long lagoon at the proposed dam site is likely crocodile habitat.
 - Anecdotal stories refer to a 4-metre animal shot at the Urannah Causeway.
 - A 1.8-metre specimen has recently been photographed at the Bowen River Weir some 47.9km away.³

BIRDS

- Scarlet honeyeater
 - The numbers of these birds present at this site were unusual. Usually this species is nomadic, but the unusually large numbers and different age groups may mean that this is an area where they are resident - further visits will establish the nature of the bird's relationship to the area.
- Black-necked storks [Jabiru]
 - 3 Black-necked storks were seen in the lagoon at the proposed dam site. One adult and two young.
 - This area then is probably an important foraging area for this rare bird.
- Squatter pigeons
 - A number of the southern form of this species was seen and some photographed. This form is becoming increasingly rare in the south.
- Grey falcons [possible]
 - Two grey raptors were seen on day 1 & 2 in display flights near the camp site [20°56.637'S 148°20.608'E].
 - The only barring seen was in the wings and the leading edge of the wings were black. This description fits the rare grey falcon.
 - This bird is rare, but its presence here needs to be confirmed.
- Barn owl type [possible]
 - On the morning of day 3 a bird was seen flying near the camp site
 - It may have been an owl of the genus *Tyto*.

OVERALL

- No stylos or introduced grasses seen

During the 3-day visit, an active lookout for buffel grass and stylos was maintained. No sightings were made. It seems likely that the area has never suffered any 'pasture improvement'⁴ Because of this and the physical nature of this 'Hidden Valley', the lack of introduced pasture species would make it an almost unique representation of the pre-European vegetation of this area, Because of the dry condition of pastures at the time of the visit, further work needs to be carried out to make a better assessment of the pasture condition.

³ 24Aug04 Ian Sutton.

⁴ The wife of the former owner Mrs Angus said as much when asked if this was so on Day 3. They were visiting Urannah after attending a gathering at Clovelly Station the previous night.

DISCUSSION

A hidden valley with almost pristine conditions, no weeds, bluegum forest, koalas, ironbox, ironbark slopes, a river that is the most permanent in the Burdekin System, health fish, tortoise.

Although Urannah is close by to several centres⁵, the topography and the lack of good road access makes it a very remote place. 4WD vehicles are necessary in the dry season and the Wet renders the area virtually impassable.

Once one descends into the valley, the area is walled in by the ranges on all sides, except for a gap near Mt Cauley where the Broken River exits on its journey westward.

These physical barriers and the joint boundary with Eungella National Park to the south east, plus the lack of any past "pasture improvements" render the area an isolated 'island' of vitually pristine natural heritage.

It is a secure, almost unique example of pre-European vegetation of the area.

⁵ It lies about between Collinsville [67km] and Mackay [90km] - as the crow flies.

BIRD LIST

30 species were seen & noted during the September 2004 trip.

<i>species</i>	<i>common name</i>
Anhinga melanogaster	dartar
Ardea novaehollandiae	white-faced heron
Xenorhynchus asiaticus	black necked stork
Anas superciliosa	black duck
Aviceda subcristata	baza
Aquila audax	wedge-tailed eagle
Falco hypoleucos	grey falcon ⁶
Coturnix ypsilophora	brown quail
Gallinula tenebrosa	dusky moorhen
Geopelia striata	peaceful dove
Geophaps scripta	squatter pigeon
Calyptorhynchus banksii	red-tailed black-cockatoo
Cacatua galerita	sulphur-crested cockatoo
Platycercus adscitus	pale-headed rosella
Cacomantis flabelliformis	fan-tailed cuckoo
Ninox novaeseelandiae	boobook owl
Dacelo leachii	blue-winged kookaburra
Dacelo novaeguineae	laughing kookaburra
Gerygone palpebrosa	fairy warbler
Philemon citreogularis	little friar bird
Entomyzon cyanotis	blue-faced honeyeater
Lichmera indistincta	brown honeyeater
Myzomela obscura	dusky honeyeater
Philemon corniculatus	noisy friarbird
Myzomela sanguinolenta	scarlet honeyeater
Lichenostomus flavus	yellow honeyeater
Neochmia temporalis	red-browed finch
Dicrurus bracteatus	drongo
Stepera graculina	pieb currawong
Corvus orru	Torresian crow

⁶ needs confirmation

VEGETATION - species list

20 species were seen & noted during the September 2004 trip.

<i>species</i>	<i>common name</i>
Acacia holoserica	silver wattle
Aristida sp	3 awn grass
Callistemon viminalis	weeping bottle brush
Casuarina cunninghamiana	river oak
Cynodon dactylon	green couch
Erythrina vespertilio	bats wing coral tree
Eucalyptus creba	narrow leaved ironbark
Eucalyptus platyphylla	poplar gum
Eucalyptus raveretiana	black ironbox
Eucalyptus tereticornus	forest red gum - blue gum
Ficus opposita	sandpaper fig
Ficus rubiginosa	rusty fig
Ficus virens	white fig
Heteropogon contortus	black spear grass
Lomandra multiflora	many-flowered mat rush
Lophostemon grandiflora	northern swamp mahogany
Planchonia careya	cocky apple
Syzygium australe	creek cherry
Themeda triandra	kangaroo grass
Waterhousea floribunda	