

## MEMBERS PAGE

## LFW AT 'BILINGURR' - A BROOME PERSPECTIVE

Sharon Griffiths

On the outskirts of Broome, on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert and the Indian Ocean in the 'dry tropics', lives a fortunate woman with a love of the bush and no training whatsoever in land care or matters of flora and fauna. Having thrown off the shackles of domesticity and mortgages, I now have more time and direct exposure to go from just an appreciation, to an active participation in protecting the natural and cultural values that abound here.

Here on our one small hectare we have remnants of rainforest – monsoonal vine thickets, and pindan woodland along with the legacy of Aboriginal inhabitants, pastoral interests, Japanese market gardeners and horticultural enthusiasts.

On the western side, the vine thickets form a dense community of distinctive shrubs, trees and climbers eg goowal or snowball bush (*Flueggea virosa*) and snake vine (*Tinospora smilacina*) on the landward side of Cable Beach dunes. The marul or native blackberry, (*Terminalia petiolaris*) provides valuable habitat, particularly for agile wallabies (*Macropus agilis*). Thickets have high conservation and cultural value for bush food, medicines, timber and spiritual purposes - a veritable organic supermarket! In 2001, CALM declared them a Threatened Ecological Community, primarily in recognition of their limited area and vulnerability to development pressures.



Snowball bush Photo: Brian Carter

The pindan woodland is more dominant on the eastern section. Closer to the dunal sands this community is dominated by gubinge (*Terminalia ferdinandiana*) a culturally significant tree with fruit of

high nutritional value and recent commercial interest, and notably here the jigal or Kimberley bauhinia (*Bauhinia cunninghamii*). Further inland it varies into a fire-adapted community on red soils, characterised by wattles (*Acacia tumida*, *A. eriopoda* and *A. colei*) with scattered bloodwoods (*Corymbia dampieri*) and a large variety of other trees, shrubs and grasses.

A butterfly on a firestick tree, *Premna acuminata*  
Photo: Sharon Griffiths

To our north is Buckley's floodplain, and the northwest coastal area follows the song cycle of the Aboriginal people. To our south, the adjacent mango plantations and rural blocks are being transformed into the fast-developing Cable Beach tourist precinct, with camel tourism and a wildlife rehabilitation centre sited next to each other.

'Bilingurr' (called 'Hidden Valley' by the European settlers) and this part known locally as 'The Japanese Gardens' has an interesting history that has impacted on the land and its wildlife.

Part of a significant Aboriginal songcycle, the area was used for eons to sustain Aboriginal people and their culture. With the six seasons here, Yawuru people moved about the area in response to the climatic changes affecting the availability and movement of animals and plants, and their spiritual obligations. The Traditional Owners and custodians are sharing their knowledge of country with us, and their ongoing connection to Bilingurr has benefits for all of Broome.

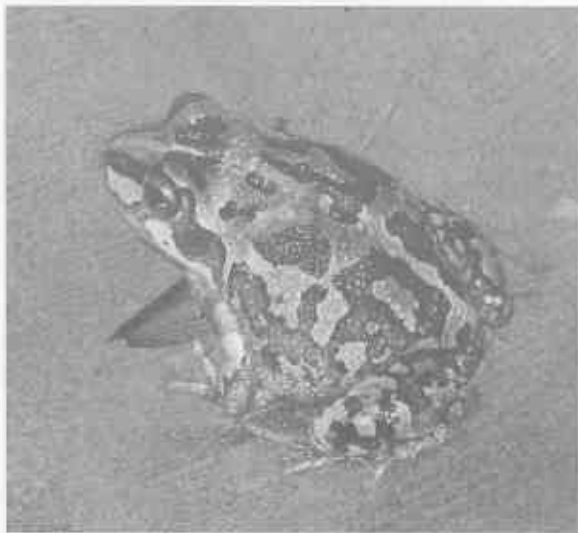
During the pastoral era, cattle from Waterbank

## A Broome perspective

Station grazed nearby, and over half of the block shows degradation from those days, with buffel grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) out-competing native species and delaying natural regeneration.

Between the first and second World Wars, Japanese people toiled hard on this land firstly to draw water supplies for the townsite, and to grow fresh produce for the residents and crews on the pearling luggers.

Photographing the plants in their various stages, identifying them and their traditional uses, and cataloguing it all, is my current passion. Fauna is now



Ornate frog, *Limnodinastes ornatus*. Photo: Sharon Griffiths

included. To date 55 species of indigenous plants, 36 animals (not including birds) and 13

weeds have been recorded.

With the gloriously wet Wet season this year, after rain I have been able to again tackle (dig out) the buffel grass. And I spend hour after hour hand pulling the reoccurring weeds. This year tree planting has not met with much success. Despite covers of wire mesh and miles of green lush pasture nearby, the wallabies know the delicacy of a young mumajen tree – *Mimusops elengi*. My greatest success is assisting natural regeneration and hours of unashamed selfish pleasure getting to know my land and its inhabitants.