



Australian Freshwater Turtle Conservation and Research Association

ABN 98 811 455 036

Post: PO Box 963, COOROY QLD 4563

Phone: (07) 5408 2616

E-mail: admin@aftera.org.au

www.aftcra.org.au

NEWSLETTER 1 June 2007

Dear Members and Friends,

Firstly, on behalf of the committee I would like to give a very warm hearted welcome to all of our new members and special thanks for the continued support of all of our current members.

Well, it has been an absolutely fantastic and busy first 'Mary River researching' season for AFTCRA Inc. and I have been looking forward to producing an up to date report detailing our successes and passing on our experiences to everyone.

Gabrielle and I have completed additional training with the Qld EPA in December 2006 at the Mon Repos Marine Turtle rookery, in Bundaberg, working on Marine turtles by night and Freshwater turtles by day, not leaving a great deal of time for sleep. Our daughter, Jordan, also joined us and is fully trained and competent in data collection and the handling of turtles. Both our son Barton and daughter Jordan have joined AFTCRA Inc. and their services have been invaluable. Jordan has helped us by recording data on many occasions, and Barton has spent many hours setting up AFTCRA's computer, programs and networking system for us.



Gabrielle carefully transferring Loggerhead Turtle eggs to an artificial nest located above the high tide mark.



**Proudly supported by the
Australian Reptile Park**

In March, at the request of Lesley Hale from Greening Australia, Gabrielle and I attended some workshops in Rockhampton. We presented some display animals and gave talks to 2 public schools as well as Rockhampton Zoo and Rockhampton Rowing Club with the main aim being identification of the 6 species of turtles in the Fitzroy drainage, especially the famous, monotypic Fitzroy River turtle. Most people had never seen a live Fitzroy River turtle and these workshops helped to generate more community interest amongst those that attended. We were also interviewed by ABC Capricornia and were filmed on WIN Television at the Rockhampton Zoo demonstration.



Myself, Gabrielle and Lesley Hale from Greening Australia, (plus a new member of AFTCRA Inc.-front right) being interviewed by Jackie Mackay at the ABC Capricornia studio.



Gabrielle and myself presenting a talk to children from Frenchville State School Rockhampton.

Photo's courtesy of Lesley Hale

Also supported by



On February 16th we made Australian history and became the first private reptile keepers to breed and release an endangered species into the wild. In collaboration with the EPA, a total of 106 Mary River turtles were released into the wild on the 16th February and 16th March 2007. Dorian McCartney assisted us for 3 days and experienced snorkelling for endangered turtles, data collection and the releasing of captive bred turtles. After witnessing how dangerous diving amongst logs and aquatic weed can be, Dorian donated a "Spare Air" emergency air supply cylinder. Thank you Dorian!



Dorian releasing Mary River turtles into the wild.

We could not have achieved this without the huge effort and support of Dr. Colin Limpus from the QLD EPA.

Once again, we wish to pass on a special thank you to the individuals and organisations that made donations to AFTCRA Inc. this past year. Thank you to Peter Johnson and Jeff Armstrong from <http://www.macherps.com/> who both generously donated their MacHerps Expo prize money.

We would also like to thank Allan Levinson and Peter Johnson for donating their time in assisting us at the Sydney Reptile Expo this year. The Expo was a huge success with over 10,000 visitors.



Thank you to Simon Grainger and 'Everything Reptile' for their kind donation of an underwater CCTV camera, complete with light and colour LCD monitor. This system has a 20 metre cable to allow underwater viewing from a boat or canoe.

EVERYTHING REPTILE

Gabrielle and I have been sub-contracted by an environmental consultancy company who are undertaking the Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed mega-dam on the Mary River at Traveston. The aim of this EIS is to provide detailed information on numbers and species of freshwater turtles, Lungfish and Mary River Cod within the dam inundation zone. In addition to this, over 20 kilometres was also sampled at Gympie and near Tiaro, over 100 kilometres downstream of the

inundation zone, to be used for comparison. 100% of all the money we have earned doing this critical work has been donated to AFTCRA Inc., which has so far amounted to over \$10,000. This has allowed us to purchase vital equipment for our own 3 year Mary River survey.

We have commenced our survey work at **one** site in the upper catchment of the Mary River and have so far caught, collected data from, tagged and released 83 turtles in total. Below is a summary of the turtles that we have processed:

Mary River turtles	<i>Elusor macrurus</i>	63
Broad-shelled turtles	<i>Chelodina expansa</i>	1
Southern-snapping turtles	<i>Elseya albagula</i>	12
Kreffft's turtles	<i>Emydura macquarii krefftii</i>	7

The most valuable information collected so far is that of the 63 Mary River turtles captured, 66% were either juveniles or sub-adults indicating that recruitment of this species in this part of the river is surprisingly very good! (Zero recruitment is when an ageing population has no juveniles reaching maturity to replace the non-breeding animals). I conservatively estimate that between 150 and 200 Mary River turtles exist in this 450 metre stretch of the river, which is an extremely dense population.

We have also been able to identify Mary River turtles' preferred habitat which consists of a riffle zone adjacent to a sandy nesting bank with less than 40% vegetation covering it (for nesting), leading into a deep pool, of over 4 metres in depth with medium to heavy log cover. We have found large populations of Mary river turtles consisting of adults, sub-adults and juveniles in the upper catchment of the Mary River with the above formula repeated at least seven times indicating that our idea of preferred habitat is a correct one. Nowhere else in the Mary River that we have looked at in our preliminary search, including in the middle (Gympie) or lower catchment (Tiaro) of the river, has such high numbers of juvenile or sub-adult turtles.

We have been visited by Mr John Seyjagat, curator of Australian exhibits at Baltimore National Aquarium, who is recommending an alliance with AFTCRA Inc. on his return to the USA. Baltimore Aquarium will be able to provide funding and we will be able to host aquarists from their institution with the aim of providing in-situ field work research and data collection training.



Mary River Turtle Nesting Bank followed by Riffle Zone and Deep Pool in the upper catchment of the river. This nesting bank is one of 12 known nesting banks that will be flooded if the mega-dam on the Mary River goes ahead.

We have also been visited by well known turtle conservationist and author Franck Bonin, from France, who has joined me on many occasions snorkelling in the Mary River. He is **absolutely outraged** at the Queensland State Government's decision to build a mega-dam on the Mary River and suggested that it should be made a World Heritage area instead, due to the vast number of threatened species and the diverse range of aquatic animals inhabiting this delicate ecosystem. Franck has written and published a letter of disapproval in two languages which is being sent worldwide!



Our new website should be up and running within the next few weeks thanks to Peter Johnson and Redman Partners. The site will have shopping cart facilities and you will be able to purchase merchandise, or pay membership fees with Paypal or credit card. We will eventually have information pages on all endangered and threatened freshwater turtle species to assist students with school projects. We are also working on the concept of 'Adopt a turtle' whereby in return for sponsorship, you will receive photo's of an individually tagged turtle as well as it's size data, and if caught again, new measurements and photo's are passed on to the sponsor.

In May, Gabrielle and I flew to Sydney to set up an AFTCRA Inc. stall at the Sydney Reptile and Amphibian Expo, run by Anthony Stimson, who happens to be one of our newest members. The expo was a huge success and we generated a lot of interest for AFTCRA Inc. with over 10,000 people attending this huge event. Since presenting a multi-media presentation on "Conservation-The Mary River Turtle Story" at the C.A.R.A conference as well as attending the stall over the 3 day period, many offers of assistance have been rolling in. We will keep you up to date with any news of these offers as they eventuate.



Gabrielle at the AFTCRA Inc. stall prepared for opening on the first day of the expo.

We have provided information and photographs to publishers for use in two separate books being, 'Locally Wild: Keeping Native Animals as Pets' as well as a text book for the school curriculum on Threatened Species.

We have also provided Greening Australia with information and photographs for their wonderful fact sheets and posters on the Fitzroy River turtle. With Greening Australia's permission, we hope to have these available as downloads for members of AFTCRA Inc., free of charge.



On the 18th February Gabrielle also attended the 'MacHerps' expo at an AFTCRA Inc. information stall to also help to generate interest in the association. A lot of fun was had by all and Gabrielle reports that she enjoyed the networking and meeting others with similar interests.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my wife, Gabrielle, for all of her hard work and assistance to the organisation and running of AFTCRA Inc. as Secretary and acting Treasurer etc. Gabrielle has been a pillar of strength when I have found times extremely difficult.

Keep an eye out for our new website coming soon!

Kind regards,

Craig Latta-President-AFTCRA Inc.



Catch you later!