



**Wildlife Queensland**  
Your Voice for Your Wildlife



## A Message From the Coordinator

Welcome to this, the first newsletter of the Queensland Glider Network (QGN). The QGN itself is a new initiative of Wildlife Queensland (WQ), and something that we hope will grow into a valuable hub for glider related issues, including glider conservation, research and rehabilitation. Queensland is indeed fortunate to host all six of Australia's glider species, ranging from the possum-sized Greater glider to the mouse-sized Feather-tailed glider. Despite the diversity of sizes and life-styles amongst these species, they are all united in their need for forest and woodland habitats, and in their susceptibility to threats arising from human activities in their habitat.

Knowledge is one of the key tools that we can use to ensure that glider populations remain viable in all areas of the state. We hope that knowledge will lead to more informed habitat management, and advocacy on behalf of these delightful creatures. We also trust that whether you are a conservationist, naturalist, carer, student, researcher or just interested in gliders, you will find the QGN has something to offer you, and that in turn, you have information to share with the rest of us.

To maximise the relevance of the QGN to you, and for us to make the most of your skills and experience we'd be delighted if you would fill in the attached questionnaire and return it to us. I hope that you find this newsletter of interest and that the QGN will provide a valuable meeting place and resource centre for all people with glider interests and issues.

*Dr Scott Burnett, Wildlife Projects Manager, Wildlife Queensland  
glider@wildlife.org.au*



Yellow-bellied Glider

## About the Queensland Glider Network

The QGN is funded initially by a grant of \$15,000 received from the Gambling Community Benefit Fund. This funding is being used to set-up the QGN and to initiate the 'Gliders in the Spotlight' program. This program is an initiative that will build community capacity to monitor glider populations in a scientifically rigorous manner. WQ is initially proposing to run a six month pilot project within south-east Queensland, however it would be great to ultimately see the network extend throughout the beyond Queensland. Gliders don't recognise political boundaries, nor do the factors that threaten their populations.

As a member or participant of QGN you will have the opportunity to take part in a series of training workshops that will allow you to develop skills in glider identification and monitoring. Following on from these workshops, monitoring will be undertaken in bushland sites across south-east Queensland. Initially monitoring will be supervised, however it won't be long before you find yourself perfectly comfortable with and capable of undertaking glider monitoring unsupervised. Forms of monitoring will include spotlighting, stagwatching (observation of hollow bearing trees) and feed tree observation. These are proven methods used by scientists and natural resource managers to monitor glider populations. Please note that monitoring will not involve live trapping or handling of animals, and ethical considerations for spotlighting and stagwatching will be included in all workshop training. All survey data will be analysed by a professional ecologist and will contribute towards a better understanding of the distribution, abundance and population trends of Queensland glider species, which is crucial to their effective conservation.

Not only will gliders benefit from this project, there are many ways you, as a member or participant, will benefit too! The project is intended to be a fun, educational experience that will broaden your understanding of gliders, their habitat needs and the wonders of the bushland around you. At the same time you will meet like-minded people, young and old, to share information with and perhaps kindle some community spirit. Also, for those who feel helpless in the face of the many threats to global biodiversity, the QGN may provide you with an on-ground action that will leave you feeling that you have contributed something positive and real to the world!

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## Feature Glider # 1

### **Feathertail Glider *Acrobates pygmaeus***

This mouse-sized, gliding possum is appropriately named for its feather-like tail (see picture below). Feathertail gliders are not closely related to any other gliders or possums, they belong to their very own family; the Acrobatidae.

The gliding membrane in this species stretches from elbow to ankle; glides of 20m or more are not unusual. The feather-like tail is thought to act as a stabilizer, rudder and brake during gliding, and assists with balance while climbing. Climbing is also facilitated by the broad pads beneath the toes which enables this species to cling onto smooth-barked Eucalypt trunks and even vertical glass windows.



Feathertail gliders are rarely seen in the wild, even in areas where they are known to occur. This is probably explained by their diminutive size and very dull eyeshine when spotlighted at night. Despite this, there are occasional reports of aggregations of 40 or more of these animals in a single flowering tree. Presumably this has something to do with breeding or out-of-season flowering of some favourite food. More often, Feathertail gliders are encountered only after they have been brought in by the family cat or during tree clearing operations.

Feathertail gliders feed on a range of plant and insect foods however pollen and nectar from Eucalypt and Banksia flowers forms a significant part of their diet. The Feathertail glider's tongue is tipped with a brush of fine hairs, specifically designed for pollen and nectar gathering. Feathertails also imbibe the sap which leaks from incisions made in tree trunks and branches by larger glider species. They also eat lerps and other small insects of the trunk and canopy.

Pollen is an excellent source of protein for the Feathertail glider, however as individual pollen grains are too small to chew, and the pollen is resistant to the gliders digestive enzymes, they have to eat it twice to get the benefits out of it. The first time it is eaten as pollen licked from flowers and the second time after it has fermented in the gut and passed through the digestive system (this behaviour is termed 'coprophagy'). The species is a potentially very significant pollinator of some species of Eucalypt, which appear to be adapted to pollination by mammalian pollinators.

Feathertail gliders nest in family groups, consisting of parents and at least the previous litter of young. They build a nest of dry gum leaves in tree spouts with narrow entrances (about 1.5cm diameter), which restrict access to competitors or predators, almost all of which are larger than this tiny species. Presumably where tree spouts are rare, Feathertails can also be found nesting in power boxes and banana bags. Up to 25 gliders have been found nesting together during the day, but more often the number is much less than this.

Female Feathertail gliders have a well-developed, forward facing pouch within which up to four young may be reared. Once they become too large for the pouch, they are left behind in the den while the mother forages. The young are weaned at around 14 weeks, but may continue to live with the parents until the following season or beyond. Feathertail gliders appear to exhibit a degree of embryonic diapause, in which undeveloped embryos are stored within the uterus until the current litter is raised or lost, at which point the rate of embryonic development is sped up and the second litter can be born soon after. Breeding can occur year round, but there appears to be a nadir in births during Autumn.

Female Feathertail gliders exhibit strong site fidelity, however males are more mobile. One male was known to have traveled 600m between successive capture points. Home range size varies from about 0.5 to 2ha per animal.

Although we have a fair idea of the overall distribution of this species in Australia (see our website for an up-to-date distribution map), there is little to no information on the finer scale distribution of the species. Anybody who has ever seen a Feathertail Glider is encouraged to report it to us via our website, via email, phone or snail mail.



c. Steve Parish Publishing

Feathertail glider

## Did You Know?

The six species of gliders in Queensland are the Greater, Yellow-bellied, Squirrel, Sugar, Mahogany and Feather-tail gliders. Aside from the Mahogany glider, all are widespread throughout eastern Queensland (and other eastern states).

In 1882 a skin of the Mahogany glider was described as a new species. However, as no live individuals were recorded for over a century, it became presumed that the Mahogany glider did not exist and was in fact a Squirrel glider. In the late 1980's, a Mahogany glider skin collected in Tully was located in the Queensland Museum. A subsequent expedition to the Tully region recorded live Mahogany gliders and the species once again became recognised in its own right!

The Feathertail glider is the world's smallest gliding mammal.



c. Steve Parish Publishing

Yellow-bellied glider

### Find Out More About Gliders

The WQ website contains information about all six Australian glider species—you can even listen to some of their calls! You can visit our website at [www.wildlife.org.au](http://www.wildlife.org.au)

Other websites containing interesting glider information can be found at:

[www.geocities.com/ozwildlife/index.htm](http://www.geocities.com/ozwildlife/index.htm)

[www.australianmammals.org.au/Species/species.htm](http://www.australianmammals.org.au/Species/species.htm)

[www.wildcare.org.au/html/possms01.htm](http://www.wildcare.org.au/html/possms01.htm)

[www.qmuseum.qld.gov.au/features/endangered/animals/mag\\_glider.asp](http://www.qmuseum.qld.gov.au/features/endangered/animals/mag_glider.asp)

[www.rainforest-crc.jcu.edu.au/publications/infosheets/mahoganyGlider.pdf](http://www.rainforest-crc.jcu.edu.au/publications/infosheets/mahoganyGlider.pdf)

The Yellow-bellied, Mahogany, Squirrel, Sugar and Feather-tail gliders include the sap of Eucalypts in their diet. To extract the sap, they use their teeth to create an incision in the trunk of a tree, or they feed on the incisions that other species make. Gliders may use the same trees over a number of years. Trees with 'sap sites' indicate the presence of glider populations – QGN will include this as part of our monitoring.



c. Steve Parish Publishing

Squirrel gliders feeding on *Banksia* sp.

### About Wildlife Queensland

The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (*Wildlife Queensland* or WQ) is a community environmental group with a wonderfully diverse membership drawn together by a common interest in wildlife. *Wildlife Queensland* started in 1962 and since that time has been working to protect Australia's precious and vanishing natural environment. The first meetings were held in Brisbane, and as the Society respects the importance of local knowledge and local action, branches were quickly established throughout Queensland. Throughout the year we hold events, such as special presentations, Batty Boat Cruises and wildlife conferences. We also publish *Wildlife Australia Magazine*.

There are many opportunities to get involved and WPSQ would love to hear from you! If you would like to know more about our organisation or are interested in volunteering, please contact us at:

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